



# Golden tickets

THE MOST EXCLUSIVE VILLAS, SAFARI CAMPS, GUIDES AND JET TRIPS  
FOR HOLIDAYS IN A BUBBLE. BY LISA GRAINGER

THE PRIVATE ISLAND

As winter closes in, who doesn't dream of a tropical island – particularly one with a private villa that can be reached by private jet, such as the new Royal Residence at Raffles Meradhoo (available as a package through Vertis Aviation)? Or a nonstop commercial flight followed by a quick hop on a waterplane in the Maldives to a gorgeous remote villa, such as the refurbished Private Reserve, the largest overwater villa in the world (gili-lankanfushi.com), or the new Voavah, the private island just off Four Seasons' Landaa Giraavaru (fourseasons.com). According to George Morgan-Grenville, of Red Savannah (redsavannah.com), islands are the hottest destination this winter for those happy to travel – not only because of their low Covid numbers, but new packages created by private jet companies that will transport guests from their homes in the UK to an island with minimum contact. For example, Entourage Travel has a new partnership with VistaJet to destinations such as Velaa Private Island in the Maldives, where guests can be on the beach within 35 minutes of landing in Malé, or Chris Blackwell's Island Outpost in Jamaica (entourage-collection.com).

Villa companies have created “bubble holidays”: CV Villas, for instance, offers the use of the ten-bedroom Crystal Springs in Barbados, which has staff, a beach and a speedboat from £50,486 a week (cvvillas.com). And Turquoise Holidays (turquoiseholidays.co.uk) can arrange for a group of up to 20 guests to take over Six Senses' Zil Pasyon, which is on a private island in the Seychelles, from £14,777 a person for seven nights, with insurance cover through Campbell Irvine, including Covid cover. For those who want an island of their own, several owners are happy to share theirs, including Thanda Island in Tanzania, with its glass-bottom pool (thandaisland.com); the 35-acre Quilalea in Mozambique, fringed by healthy reefs (azura-retreats.com), or the dreamy Laucala in Fiji, home to Mr Red Bull, Dietrich Mateschitz, with its chefs, golf course and jungle spa (laucala.com). There's obviously an appetite for island life, Morgan-Grenville says, as Red Savannah's web traffic, which had fallen to 30 per cent of its 2019 levels, has suddenly become busy. “People have a latent desire to travel,” he says. “And I guess that, of all places, islands feel relatively safe.”

THE HOME SWAP

If you have seen enough of your own four walls for a while, OneFineStay has added island homes to its portfolio of private places in which to hunker down. The properties now range from the one-suite Gladden Private Island, a tiny cay in Belize, to the elegant four-bedroom Via dei Banchi Nuovi house in Rome (onefinestay.com). Having started out with fabulous homes in cities, the Plum Guide (plumguide.com), which regards itself as the Michelin Guide of home rentals, now has homes in country spots from Suffolk to Scotland. It also provides 24/7 help if the host isn't available. And for those who would rather swap a home than rent one, from a collection owned by carefully vetted clients, Thirdhome (thirdhome.com) club now has 11,000 properties around the world, from ski resorts to game farms. According to Giles Adams, Thirdhome's chief executive, bookings have risen not just because members are happier using an asset, rather than spending cash, but because “instead of the usual £30,000 they'd normally spend on renting a home they can invest in flying more safely, in their own bubble”.

THE VILLOTTEL

There is no industry (other than, perhaps, airlines) that has had to change as fast as hotels since the advent of Covid-19. Only a year ago hoteliers were falling over each other to formulate new “guest experiences” and to create a vibrant interactive scene in their public spaces. Today privacy and safety are the (less interesting) buzzwords, which explains the sudden proliferation of “villotels”, or private villas within a hotel, that have dedicated staff, chefs, entrances, pools, gyms and even spas for the ultimate bubble stay. Jules Maury, the head of Scott Dunn Private (scottdunn.com), whose coveted little black travel book is a compendium of the world's most glorious yachts, villas, suites and private islands, says: “People want to travel only if they can control their environment; they don't want to sit at a bar if other people have just touched it. Whereas in their own villa, or hotel wing, they know precisely who has been in to it, and can instruct the staff to do things in the way they feel safe.” Although Maury has seen demand rocket for villas, “particularly in countries without quarantine restrictions”, she says that some clients who have been locked down for months “want a bit of outside

interaction every now and then”. Hence the popularity of villotels such as the owner's houses at each of the Luxury Lodges of New Zealand (luxurylodgesofnz.co.nz); the Huchet Beach House attached to Les Prés d'Eugénie in Landes (lespresdeugenie.com); the apartments of La Réserve in Paris (lareserveparisapartments.com); Châlet Zeno at Rosa Alpina in the Dolomites (rosaalpina.it); or La Chartreuse, Michel Reybier's private home near his Cos d'Estournel vineyard (estournel.com). Several hotels have opened villotels in the past few months, including the nine-bedroom, 17th-century palatial Mayor's Residence, attached to the Waldorf Astoria in Amsterdam (luxurysuites.hilton.com); the Anahita Resort's sprawling six-bedroom Villa Charlotte in Mauritius (villasdemaitre.com/villa-charlotte-mauritius); and in Megève, France, ten private chalets attached to the Sibuet family's much-loved Les Fermes de Marie (fermesdemarie.com). “If you're worried about shielding family, or quarantining, then these are the ideal sorts of properties,” Maury says. “It helps that I've personally been to inspect many of them, because clients feel reassured, knowing I've been the guinea pig.”



THE SAFARI CAMPS

Other than South Africa, Ethiopia and Nigeria, the vast majority of African countries south of the Sahara have had relatively few coronavirus deaths (in the tens, or hundreds, rather than thousands). This may explain why as soon as borders started to open across the continent this autumn safari operators reported a spike in inquiries. The trend is unsurprising when you consider the nature of a safari, says Nicola Shepherd of the Explorations Company (theexplorationscompany.com). “Most clients would travel in a bubble anyway,” she says. “Private plane, then private bush villa, private vehicle and private safari guide. Because you're outside, in the middle of nowhere, it feels very safe – and camps are spending a fortune testing all their staff weekly.” During lockdown, several companies have also had time to upgrade or rebuild their camps, or to create new villas. Wolwedans in Namibia has built a new Mountain View suite, where visitors can safari without interacting with other guests (wolwedans.com). In Zambia, on the wildlife-rich Busanga Plains, Chisa Busanga has built “nest” rooms, high above the ground, in which to cocoon, away from public space (greensafaris.com). One & Only has opened two-bedroom Forest Suites in its new Nyungwe House camp, from which primate-lovers can set out into the forest to track chimpanzees (oneandonlyresorts.com). In Kenya Angama Mara has erected a four-tent camp in the heart of the southwestern Mara Triangle so that guests can watch the great migration on their own (angama.com). In Botswana, Wilderness Safaris has rebuilt Little DumaTau camp, with four tents and a sleek poolhouse for hanging out in the hot midday sun (wilderness-safaris.com).

There has also been interest from families keen to take children into the bush for an extended period, homeschooling them while teaching them bushcrafts, says Alice Gully of Aardvark Safaris. Ideal safari-houses include Jabali and Serengeti House in Tanzania, Laragai and Arijiju in Kenya, the Nest in Namibia, and Luangwa House and Tongabezi in Zambia (aardvarksafaris.com). For those who enjoy solitude – and are happy to quarantine – there has never been a more peaceful time to go, says Chris McIntyre, the founder of Expert Africa, whose website (expertafrica.com) allows travellers to plan a trip based on the creatures they would like to see. During this year's migration at the Mara River, at which there may usually be 40 other vehicles, he says, clients were there on their own. “And that really is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. A silver lining.”



Mayor's Residence at the Waldorf Astoria, Amsterdam. Top right: Chisa Busanga, Zambia. Opposite: Gladden, Belize

'In your own villa or hotel wing  
you know precisely who has been  
there and touched things'





THE SKI STRIP

If you own a private plane, or have part shares in one through a company such as Jetfly, which manages 24 eight-seater PC12s and five PC24 aircraft for fractional owners, you will be licensed to flit not only into large airports, but also to tiny airstrips right beside the main ski resorts.

The ultimate airstrip, according to Jetfly’s director Jonathan Clough, is the Courchevel 1850 altiport. “From there, with eight of you in a Pilatus, you can just put on your skis and leave us with your luggage, which makes a weekend’s skiing, in a private bubble, pretty stress-free,” he says.

Here is our list of airstrips within 30 minutes of the slopes, as well as the finest private spaces to stay, recommended by Annabel Seel, of ALS Ski.

TIME FROM TOUCHDOWN TO SKI SLOPE

<b>France</b> Courchevel 1850 Altiport: 0 min Stay at Chalet Gentianes	<b>Austria</b> St Johann Airport to Kitzbuhel: 14 min Stay at the new Six Senses Residences
<b>Switzerland</b> Sion Airport to Crans Montana: 30 min Stay at Chalet Ultima	<b>Italy</b> Aosta Airport to Courmayeur: 30 min Stay at the Le Massif hotel, in a rooftop suite
Saanen Airport to Gstaad: 9 min Stay at Chalet Lottie	All chalets come with private chefs and staff, through als-ski.com
Samedan Airport to St Moritz: 10 min Stay at Chalet Chesetta	

PRIVATE JETS

Airport hell, layovers, weather disruption, other people’s children, our own children and jet lag. It’s no wonder that, even before coronavirus, those who had a bit of cash were flying private.

With more than 90 per cent of commercial flights grounded at one point, the number of inquiries from families seeking private jet travel has hit record levels, says Andy Christie of Air Charter Service, which manages 23,000 charter flights a year. He says that nine out of ten inquiries this summer came from first-time users, such as families who did not want to miss out on their summer holiday, older passengers who are more at risk of infection and children returning to boarding school (more than a fifth of private-jet passengers this summer were children, according to Private Fly, a charter broker).

Although the cost of flying private is substantially higher than commercial – VistaJet says that its average flights cost between \$10,000 and \$19,000 an hour – the benefits are obvious. Flying privately also limits the numbers of person-to-person interactions from about 270 on commercial flights to 20 on a private flight, according to a study by the jet-charter operator Globe Air. You can travel in your bubble at a time that’s convenient, and you can take off and land where you want to on small airfields.

You don’t have to own your own jet, either, or even have your own broker. Thanks to a range of options from jet-share to membership cards, operators that style themselves the “Amazon of business aviation”, the “Netflix of airlines” or “the Uber of the skies” are circling to lure first-time private fliers. How to find the right service for you depends on how often you intend to fly. Newbies who want the best value should look for empty legs. These

become available when a private jet is booked for a one-way flight. The prices are half that of the outbound leg and you don’t need to commit to more than one ride. At £2,000 per aircraft per leg for, say, Nice to London or Malaga to London, it can work out cheaper than flying commercial in business class if you have five or six passengers, through companies such as Air Charter Service, PrivateFly or Victor.

One up from “bargain” private flying is the private-jet card. NetJets, VistaJet and AirPartner all offer a card with a set number of flying hours a year, typically about 25 hours for about £160,000 (payment upfront). If you want to fly even higher, you could try fractional or shared ownership, which offers a share of the ownership of an aircraft and a set number of flying hours a year (usually a minimum of 50 hours). It typically costs about £500,000 a year for a minimum of three years. Marine Eugene, managing director at Flexjet, says that fractional ownership of a new jet, such as the \$11 million (£8.42 million) Bombardier Learjet 75 Liberty, can start at \$715,000 (£547,243) plus your share of the monthly management fees for the aircraft.

Chartering a jet “on-demand” via Air Charter Service, Air Partner, JetFly, PrivateFly or Victor allows you to select the best aircraft for your trip, whether that’s an eight-seater Pilatus to flit you to Paris in 45 minutes or a 14-seater Gulfstream G-IV to go nonstop from London to Singapore. The snag, as ever, is the price tag: from £10,000 an hour.

Many companies have carbon offsetting options in place. Victor offsets 200 per cent of carbon emissions and Clive Jackson, the firm’s founder, would like customers to top that up. “Ideally to offset by as much as 1,000 per cent,” he says. *John Arlidge*



‘As well as paddleboarding by icebergs, guests can be flown to ski in the Sunmore Alps’

THE BIG ADVENTURE

If flying on a private Gulfstream 550 jet to Antarctica from Cape Town on New Year’s Day and staying in luxury pods wasn’t swanky enough, White Desert Antarctica and Cookson Adventures have added excursions on the yacht M/Y Legend to their next 24-day trip to the South Pole in January. The 77m vessel, fitted with a three-seater submersible and a helicopter, will allow a bubble of 12 to explore the continent from above and below the water with the renowned explorer Henry Cookson and the record-breaking polar explorer Patrick Woodhead. The considerable carbon generated will be offset through the Carbon Neutral Company and is factored into the equally considerable \$2.965 million cost (cooksonadventures.com).

Although other private-jet companies aren’t venturing as far south, several are creating bespoke bubble trips. The jet company 365 Aviation has two-day trips to see watches being made at the Jaeger LeCoultre headquarters or to sip rare vintages at Champagne Taittinger (365aviation.com/partners), and the Oetker Collection has taken on Sparfell Aviation to whisk guests between its hotels in privacy (sparfell.aero). VistaJet’s Safe Havens holidays range from taking over a town in Colorado to commandeering a villa at the Chêne Bleu winery in France (vistajet.com) and Aman Hotels is using a private Bombardier Global 5000 jet to whisk guests between hotels (aman.com). Plus, LuxAviation has also created a range of Amazing Trips, with treats from swimming with manta rays in Indonesia to watching gorillas in Rwanda. The hitches, as ever, are not just the carbon generated, but the cost. A five-day trip from London to Spitsbergen, Norway, costs £143,000 for eight people (luxaviation.com).

THE SNOW BOAT

There aren’t many boats from which you can ski. This season, thanks to the demand for exclusive buyouts, the luxury extreme-adventure company Pelorus (pelorusx.com), which is run by the former British Army officers Jimmy Carroll and Geordie Mackay-Lewis, has access through Edmiston yachts to La Datcha, one of the finest expedition yachts with an ice-class hull, which can sail all the way to Kamchatka, Russia. Here, with the aid of two on-board helicopters, guests can be airlifted from volcano to volcano and ski along powder snow down a 2,000m slope before warming up in the wellness centre. Guests can choose to continue adventuring with other onboard toys, including a submersible, two waverunners and two snow-scooters.

Smaller and perhaps more accessible is HMS Gassten, the former minesweeper, which can be taken over exclusively by a group of up to ten people looking to explore the fjords of Norway, and stop off at private islands for saunas and lighthouse stays. As well as hiking in forests and to the summit of Saxa, paddleboarding beside icebergs and kayaking in remote fjords, guests can be taken by helicopter to ski in the Sunmore Alps before returning to deck to enjoy fish caught off the fjords. A six-night trip for up to eight people costs from £30,000, plus £4,477 a person for return flights on a private jet with NetJets (hmsgassten.com).

THE ARCTIC RETREAT

After Janne Honkanen couldn’t find accommodation in the Arctic Circle in which he would be happy to stay, he built his own: Octola, which has become one of the finest lodges from which to tap into Finland’s vast tracts of icy wilderness.

This year the latest addition to his “spa for the spirit”, in 740 acres of forest, is the coolest two-bedroom private villa in the Arctic Circle. With floor-to-ceiling windows, wooden interiors and contemporary Scandi furnishings, the house is part modernist glasshouse, part traditional Sami cabin. It comes with geothermal heating and a wood-burning sauna, a chef to prepare modern Nordic cuisine (from Octola’s cookbook, voted best in Scandinavia in 2017); private guides for tobogganing, skiing, snow-shoeing and husky-sled trips; and on-demand reindeer sledding and ice-driving. For the hardy, guides will erect tepees in the snow, warmed by reindeer-skin carpets and down duvets, allowing guests to hear and feel nature – or, as Honkanen puts it, “savour the healing qualities of Lapland’s stunning natural environment”. With some luck, guests may also see the northern lights while feasting on pine-salted wild salmon and lingonberry tart at a campfire.

*Red Savannah (redsavannah.com) offers four nights at Octola Villa from £12,390 a person based on four adults sharing, inclusive of full-board accommodation and privately guided activities*



Octola, Arctic Circle. Top left: HMS Gassten. Opposite: Courchevel 1850 altiport