



Churchill Wild gives guests photo opportunities for Arctic wildlife in a pristine untrammeled wilderness setting. Polar bears can be photographed in a backdrop of stunning sea and landscapes. Photo courtesy of Churchill Wild

HOT TRAVEL TRENDS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Do you think you've been there and done that? Well, not this year. **CYNTHIA ROSENFELD** dishes out the latest ways to trot the globe.



During the months of October and November, polar bears congregate along the coast of the Hudson Bay as they wait for the bay to freeze so they can begin their annual hunt. Photo courtesy of Churchill Wild

Despite political, economic, and environmental challenges around the world, we continue to hit the road in search of new adventures. Here's a look at how we'll be traveling in 2012.

1. EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL

Sophisticated travelers no longer simply seek a swanky guestroom but yearn for more meaningful encounters. Africa travel specialist Joel Zack, the founder of Heritage Tours Private Travel (www.htprivatetravel.com), says: "Travel is becoming as much about dialogue as the destination. People still spend money, but they are looking for what and who will make a deeper impression." The most meaningful of these cultural interactions offer mutual, incalculable benefits. A popular stop on Heritage Tours' South Africa itineraries is nominally billed as a cooking lesson on traditional African foods. Visitors arrive at the small school in Langa Township cobbled together from modified railroad freight cars and filled with equipment tossed out by restaurants. "Our clients think the outing will be about cooking something delightfully exotic like mango *chakalaka*," explains Zack, "then they revel in the interaction with these kids. Most of our clients call this the highlight of their trip and they can't even remember what they cooked! These kids get as much out of the encounter



Guests of ABOUTAsia Travel come from all over the world to interact with Cambodian children. ABOUTAsia is now recognized as an expert in VIP and 5-star tours and is trusted by Orient Express, Raffles, Sofitel, Hotel de la Paix, and other hotels.

because it's not every day visitors come to share far-away worlds."

Interactions with animals are getting more up close and personal as well. In Canada, Churchill Wild (www.churchillwild.com) brings humans closer than ever before to the iconic wildlife around Hudson Bay. It operates four private lodges strategically located along the edge of the Arctic Circle. The season is also expanding to accommodate rising guest curiosity, as well as that of the polar bears, who marketing director Rick Kemp says "will come right up to the lodge in summertime and look in our windows."

2. PURPOSEFUL TRAVEL

Globetrotters today care as much about seeing historical sites as they do about the livelihoods of those who live in the monuments' shadows. A fateful stopover in Siem Reap on his family's trip around the world inspired Englishman and Oxford-educated Andy Booth to launch ABOUTAsia Travel (www.aboutasiatravel.com). The plugged-in, temple-focused tour operator stands apart from the pack by donating 100% of its profits to educating Cambodian children. Beyond ABOUTAsia's Angkor Wat excursions, carefully timed to avoid the camera-toting crowds, clients are invited to visit schools where they can interact with Khmer students or even stay on as



volunteer English teachers through the company's philanthropic venture, ABOUTAsia Schools (www.aboutasiaschools.org).

While in Siem Reap, style-minded travelers do good while keeping chic at Eric Raisina (www.ericraisina.com) inside FCC Angkor Hotel. The Madagascar-born couturier imparts his training in the Paris fashion houses of Yves Saint Laurent and

Students from Nanyang University in Singapore and Cornell University in the United States traveled to Cambodia as a part of a hospitality training program. The students painted the fences at one of the schools that ABOUTAsia looks after.



(ABOVE) The outdoor living space at Jnane Moussafir is a journey from West Africa to Northern India inspired by the variety of Islamic art and design. Photo by Marcel Jolibois



Madagascar-born designer Eric Raisina trains Khmer ladies in weaving couture gowns.



(LEFT) The five suites at Jnane Moussafir—African, Casablanca, Calligraphy, Persian, and Indian—are large and air-conditioned, with fireplaces, walk-in closets, and a sitting room such as this. Photo by Marcel Jolibois

Christian Lacroix to a dozen young female Khmer weavers. These women spend their first year getting paid to train on looms Raisina built to create couture ball gowns inspired by the surrounding temples, wraps made of psychedelic hued “silk fur,” and traditional men’s fishermen pants updated in preppy cotton pinstripes and Prince de Galles plaid.

3. HAUTE HOMESTAY TRAVEL

Even those who belong to five-star hotel loyalty programs increasingly seek out accommodations

with personal touches. In some cases, this extends the guest experience right into the owner’s actual home, like Jnane Tamsna (www.jnanetamsna.com) in Marrakech’s palm grove outskirts known as the Palmeraie. Owner Meryanne Loum-Martin first built an Art Deco-influenced home for her beloved father, then her own Moroccan abode among this vast area’s thousands of palm trees before continuing on to develop 24 ensuite bedrooms spread over three stunning houses (each with a private pool) within her family’s nine-acre private property. Jnane Tamsna is a verdant oasis landscaped by Loum-Martin’s husband Dr. Gary Martin, a University of California Berkeley-trained ethnobotanist. Loum-Martin made a name for herself in global design circles by creating much-photographed interiors she fills with antique Syrian inlaid mother of pearl furniture, Uzbek suzanis festooned with kaleidoscopic swirls, vintage desert photographs, and Berber carpets. Jnane Tamsna



(CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) The Siam Hotel’s Maenam Suite bathroom; entrance to The Siam Hotel’s Chinese Villa; Mae-nam Suite bedroom; The Siam Hotel’s Siam Suite bedroom

guests will find all of these in residence, along with gourmet organic cuisine sourced from their 150-acre pesticide-free farm and Diva, the family’s pet Ridgeback.

Hoteliers are also incorporating historic houses into their anything-but-traditional room inventories. Ultra private and set along Bangkok’s scenic Chao Phraya River, the Thai House is a one-of-a-kind teakwood home originally brought from the ancient capital of Ayutthaya to Bangkok by silk tycoon Jim Thompson and most recently pimped up as the top accommodation at The Siam Hotel (www.thesiamhotel.com) in Thailand’s City of Angels. When it opens next summer, this 39-suite urban retreat will mix the owner’s private collection of Southeast Asian antiquities with highly polished woods, oversized ultra plush furnishings, and all mod cons under high ceilings in a Deco setting inspired by Old Siam.

4. BEAT YOUR FRIENDS THERE TRAVEL

As timeless as travel itself is humankind’s competitive desire to get there first. Sri Lanka’s civil war has passed so now is the time to make tracks around this island often mistaken by ancient mariners for the Garden of Eden. Head north into its cultural triangle for Buddhas and ruins, then into its lush heartland to taste the famous tea, and finally down south to relax on its sun-kissed beaches, like the crescent-shaped strip of sand fronting Amanwella (www.amanresorts.com) or in its verdant interior among the exquisitely decorated suites at Kahanda Kanda (www.kahandakanda.com), the former home of George Cooper, one of London’s most heralded interior decorators.

Elsewhere in Asia, one of our planet’s most diverse bioreefs is luring the been-there done-that dive crowd to Raja Ampat in Indonesia’s West Papua region.



(FROM TOP) Kahanda Kanda's Dubu Suite; Dive Damai's *phinisi*; bathroom of Damai II

Dive down among the 1,320 species of reef fish, half of the world's soft coral species, and over 70% of all hard corals known to man. Come up to take in the breathtaking landscape of islets covered in impenetrable hardwood rainforests. Secure a berth aboard the traditional wooden schooners Damai and her just-launched sister ship Damai II. Known as *phinisi*, these 120-foot-long modern variations have been upgraded with the amenities of a floating five-star hotel for only eight passengers per launch (dive-damai.com).



OTHER TRENDS

Book Lovers Trips

Educational Travel

Vow Renewals

Slow Travel

Contemporary Culture Travel

Bucket List Experience



TRAVEL WRITER AND HOST OF NAT GEO'S WORD TRAVELS, ROBIN ESROCK ALSO SUGGESTS SOME FUTURE TRENDS:

"It's going to be interesting to see what happens with the Arab Spring. Travel operators are holding their breath that things stabilize in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. 2012 will see more people using travel apps to get around, communicate and improve the efficiency of their travel plans. All eyes are on London for the Summer Olympics. And expect more Chinese, Indian, Brazilian, and Russian tourists than ever before."
