



**#1 Bliss out at The Brando
FRENCH POLYNESIA**

For unrivalled serenity in the South Seas, newcomer The Brando is the place to be. Occupying a palm-tree-strewn pinprick 30 miles north of Tahiti, it's easy to see how the late Marlon Brando fell in love with the island while filming *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Following a multi-million dollar spruce-up, 35 rustic villas adhere to a strict carbon-neutral, low-impact design philosophy. There's a full-service lab that measures, records and releases all creatures great and small, and Guy Martin – a Parisian with Michelin stars to his name – rolls up his sleeves in the kitchen. Splendid in every way, it's just a shame the big man himself isn't around to see it.

Take me there: Villas at the Brando (thebrando.com) start from €3,000 a night. It's a 20-minute flight from Faa'a international airport (Tahiti) to The Brando with Air Tétiaroa.

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THE GREAT ESCAPE

If your new year's resolution is to explore more foreign climes, try one of these destinations: driving up ice flats in Iceland, sailing the high seas of Indonesia or tracking wild chimpanzees in Africa

WORDS: LEO BEAR



COURTESY OF VAMIZI ISLAND, MOZAMBIQUE

**#2 Take to the waters
BATH, UK**

Steeped in history, the genteel city of Bath offers Regency buildings and healing waters in abundance. Spa goddesses can bathe in the waters from the privacy of their own suites at the new Gainsborough hotel, where the mineral-rich H2O is piped up and flows from special taps in bathtubs. Occupying a trio of dashing Grade II-listed Georgian buildings, rooms are stylish and serene, but the spa is the star. Accessed via an underground tunnel, three large pools are spread across a light-filled Roman atrium – not so different from what Jane Austen might have enjoyed back in her day. Meander out of town and you've the rolling fields, and there are the dramatic valleys and pretty villages of Somerset to explore. All of which combine for a thoroughly delightful English getaway.

Take me there: The Gainsborough is due to open spring 2015. Rooms from £289. (thegainsboroughbathspa.co.uk)



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**#3 Call of the wild
AFRICA**

Dreaming of Africa? Aardvark Safaris has introduced an epic air safari that takes in some of the country's most handsome features. Journeying through the south east, you'll amass plenty of stamps in your passport crossing borders into Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Namibia. With eye candy in the form of the Rift Valley, the Serengeti, the Skeleton Coast and the Kalahari Desert, you won't ever want to put your camera down, and in between game drives, you'll be sipping G&Ts in some of the country's finest lodges including Kaya Mawa on Lake Malawi (one of our all-time favourites). What else? Tracking wild chimpanzees, meeting nomadic tribes and plunging to the depths of the Indian Ocean, that's what. Taking up to 34 days to complete in full, this really is the ultimate African odyssey.

Take me there: Bookable as a return trip or separate legs, the first leg is available from £13,870 per person with Aardvark (aardvarksafaris.co.uk) based on two sharing including international flights, transfers, accommodation and activities. Departing May 3, 2015.

#4 Geishas and gardens
JAPAN

Japan's shinkansen (bullet train) welcomes a brand-new line in March 2015, which will dramatically reduce travelling time from the capital Tokyo to Kanazawa, one of Japan's lesser-visited cities on the west coast. With a historic samurai district, the only Geisha community outside of Kyoto and the exquisite Kenrokuen gardens to admire, it's definitely one to add to the wishlist. And if you've ever dreamed of sleeping in a century-old ryokan (Japanese inn) and sipping tea the traditional way, makes sure you reserve a room at Asadaya. Trains not really your thing? Don't worry, Inside Japan can arrange helicopter transfers from Kyoto.

Take me there: Inside Japan Tours has a 14-night self-guided trip visiting Kanazawa from £2,650 per person including accommodation, local transport and two days with a private guide. (insidejapantours.com)

#5 Driving on ice
ICELAND

Two travel heavyweights, Land Rover and Abercrombie & Kent, have clubbed together to deliver the ultimate Iceland adventure. Sign up and you'll be skidding and bumping along challenging mountainous terrain in one of Land Rover's brand new Discovery Sports –

'Sign up and you'll be skidding and bumping along challenging mountainous terrain'

unearthing glaciers, lava fields and geothermal springs along the way with the Northern Lights dancing in the rear-view mirror.

Take me there: A&K has three-night itineraries in January and February 2015 from £3,995pp. (abercrombiekent.co.uk/landrover)



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COURTESY OF A&K



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#6 Navigate the high seas
INDONESIA

The beguiling islands of Komodo, home to rare reptilian dragons, are also the gatekeepers of the most dazzling subterranean deep. Tim Simond, co-founder of Original Diving, calls it 'the best diving destination on earth', and with mile upon mile of pristine coral reefs exploding with marine life (everything from manta rays and whale sharks to rare little critters such as the pygmy seahorse), it is a must for divers. Bringing you that much closer to the action, this year Silolona, a breathtaking 150ft yacht, makes her maiden voyage. Combining traditional Indonesian shipbuilding with state-of-the-art technology, she's the ultimate private charter. Best of all, with five suites and 30 crew, there's plenty of scope to bring a few shipmates along, so start dialling now!

Take me there: Original Diving has tailor-made sailing and scuba-diving trips to Komodo National Park from £6,600 per person including six nights on-board Silolona plus international and domestic flights. (originaldiving.com)



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#7 Switch off in a thoroughly modern ashram
INDIA

Nestled in a forest of skinny Sal trees on the outskirts of one of northern India's most colourful towns, Vana Retreat is a high-style haven like no other. New last year, it has all the hallmarks of a world-class design hotel yet is magically alternative. Leave your Jimmy Choos behind; guests wear linen 'pyjamas' for the duration of their stay, and instead of Champagne and chocolate, mini-bars are stocked with herb-infused water: this is living at its most pure. Throughout the resort, there's a policy of 'no handhelds', ensuring you switch off, and holistic spa treatments including everything from 'cupping' to Ku Nye (a type of Tibetan healing) will ensure you're physically and spiritually aligned. And if that all sounds a bit hippy, there's a heavenly swimming pool with views of the Himalayas to enjoy.

Take me there: Doubles from £300 per person full board at Vana Retreat including transfers and daily treatments. (vanaretreats.com)

Virgin Atlantic flies to Delhi from £628 return. Jet Airways flies from Delhi to Dehradun from £100 return.



#8 Sky high
BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Forget cruising round Napa Valley or the châteaux of France in a vintage motor. At Siwash Lake Ranch in the wilds of British Columbia, you can check out the local vineyards by chopper. New for 2015, its heli-winetasting tours take in the wineries of Fraser River Valley and the Fort Berens vineyard in Lillooet, among others. Back at the ranch, you can ride

'You can ride horseback into Crater Lake or hike through sun-drenched meadows'

horseback into Crater Lake, hike through sun-drenched meadows or try your luck at catching a trout, before settling down at a table heaving under ranch-grown organic fare paired with British Columbian wines. It's not ultra-luxury – think 'refined rustic' – but soft linens and a natural (alcohol-laced) high are guaranteed.

Take me there: Ranch Rider (ranchrider.com) offers six nights full board at Siwash Lake Ranch (siwashlakeranch.com) from £6,087 per person including a heli-winetasting tour (minimum four people), car hire and return flights. Departing May through September.



COURTESY OF SIWASH LAKE GUEST RANCH

ONES TO WATCH

LITTLE NELL

Aspen's sparkle just got a bit brighter thanks to Little Nell the legendary lodge adored by A-listers, adding nine luxury suites to its halls. Be one of the first to bed down in interior designer Holly Hunt's cosy creations. (thelittlenell.com)

D-HOTEL

D-Hotel in southern Turkey reopens its doors in April for the summer season with James Duigan's Bodyism team at the helm in the spa. Presiding over a pristine peninsula with five white-sand beaches for guests' use only, it's been nicknamed 'Maldives on the Med', although officially it's the Aegean, but who's checking? (dhotel.com.tr)



D-HOTEL MARIS

CAPE WELIGAMA

Brand-new Cape Weligama on Sri Lanka's south coast is one of the hottest hotel openings of the year. Vast villas, dramatic Indian Ocean views and a cliff-top infinity pool scream luxury and adventure in spades. (capeweligama.com)

VENICE SIMPLON-ORIENT-EXPRESS

Want to get in on the Scandi trend? From June (2015) Venice Simplon-Orient-Express is adding Stockholm and Copenhagen to its roster of classic routes. (belmond.com)

ANDBEYOND SANDIBE OKAVANGO SAFARI LODGE

Following a multi-million pound facelift, andBeyond Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge in Botswana is ready to welcome visitors. You won't find a better safari lodge in the southern hemisphere. (andbeyond.com)



COURTESY OF ANDBEYOND.COM