

THE QUIET REVOLUTION

From desert sculptures to Antarctic adventures, luxury travellers are seeking solace in serene destinations

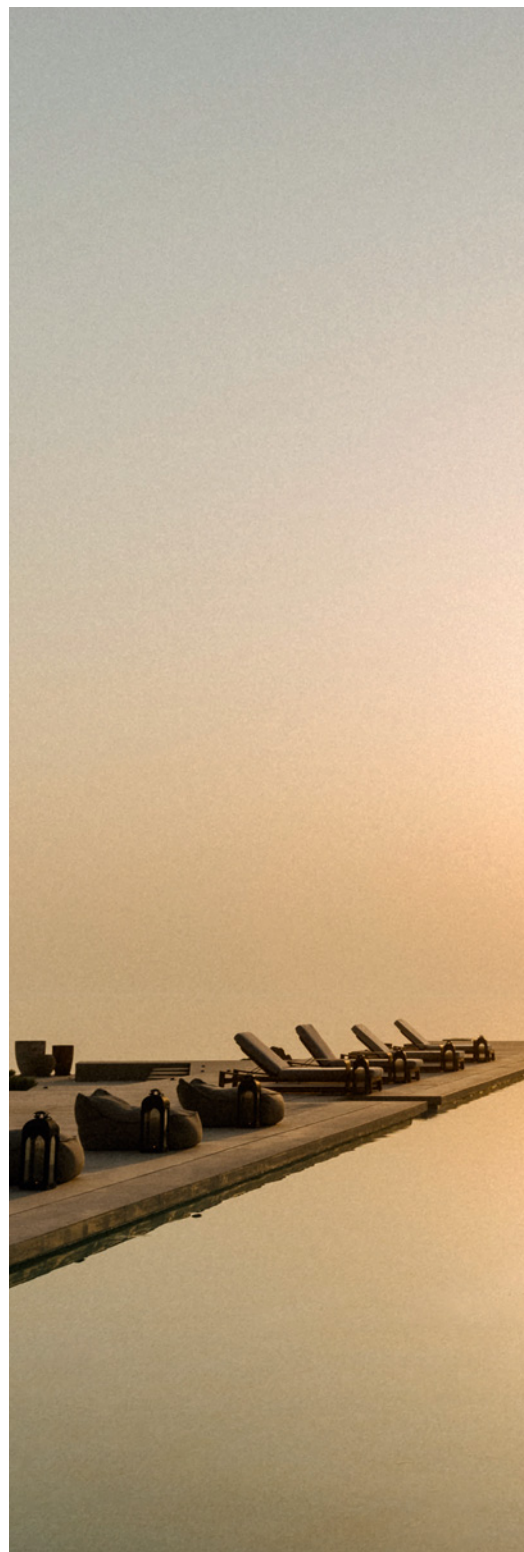
WORDS BY **LEO BEAR**

APPROXIMATELY 80 KILOMETRES west of Doha, among an expanse of white sand dunes, adventurers are met with a remarkable sculpture by the American artist Richard Serra. 'East-West/West-East' consists of four steel plates, each more than 14 metres tall, arranged in a linear pattern stretching more than a kilometre. Some say it represents the passage of time. For others, it's a symbol of hope. Whatever its meaning, it invites a moment of quiet contemplation. Those making the pilgrimage are likely to make their base at Our Habitas Ras Abrouq, a recently opened luxury camp 20 minutes' drive from the sculpture. Hot on the heels of Our Habitas AlUla, a game-changing eco-friendly enterprise in Saudi Arabia's Ashar Valley, Ras Abrouq located in the UNESCO-protected Al-Reem Biosphere Reserve, invites guests to unwind where the desert meets the sea. The founders have gone all in on the 'quiet travel' trend.

Forty-two villas range from one to four bedrooms, each with its own private pool and vast outdoor deck delivering uninterrupted views of the Arabian Gulf. Then there are the activities to consider: guided meditations through the desert, sound ceremonies conducted under the stars. Guests are invited to try ancient traditions such as clay pottery, calligraphy and Al Sadu weaving. "With the world getting louder, it's increasingly hard to find corners of quiet – and it's increasingly important," says general manager Mohammed Wazir. "What we offer at Ras Abrouq is a secluded sanctuary that encourages guests to step away from everyday distractions and embrace a slower, more purposeful way of being."

Search for the term 'quiet travel' and you'll find entire websites devoted to the detrimental effects of noise and the healing benefits of quiet. The travel trend is in direct

"In quietness the soul expands"
— William Cowper, Poet





Our Habitas Ras Abrouq Pool



alignment with the digital minimalism movement, which is gaining traction internationally thanks to the American computer science professor and author Cal Newport. In his book *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*, Newport argues for more intentional use of technology – removing apps that are not crucial tools and only picking up your smartphone when it's absolutely essential. The quest for quiet hasn't gone unnoticed by the luxury travel industry. More and more hotels are advertising 'no TVs in rooms' and 'no Wi-Fi in communal areas.' "We have definitely seen a rise in demand for 'quiet trips' among our HNW clients," says Aurelia van Lynden, head of travel at Pelorus, a travel company specialising in bespoke remote adventure. "Time is a precious commodity and this style of trip

allows people to disconnect from their day-to-day and reconnect not only with the ones they are travelling with but also with themselves and their surroundings. Our world is loud with endless pings and chatter. We help our clients cut through the noise, whether that be a private camp in the middle of nowhere, hiking untouched paths basking in the scenery or on board their own private yacht exploring remote islands." Silent safaris, off-grid Nordic adventures, Antarctic voyages and sleeping under the stars in Oman are among Pelorus' most popular offerings.

Tom Barber, co-founder of Original Travel, says: "There's been a lot of emphasis of late on dark sky destinations, where there is no light pollution and you can appreciate the wonders of the night sky, but we're also seeing growing demand from clients who

want to avoid noise pollution." For this reason, Original Travel launched a 'pin drop collection' of places where you can literally hear a pin drop. Speaking from personal experience, Barber says: "I will never forget the sound of silence in the NamibRand desert in Namibia. I was driven out to a beautiful viewpoint and left there to soak up the panoramic views and total absence of sounds with a cool bag of drinks. It's places like these that make you realise just how much noise most of us are bathed in, especially in urban environments. There's rarely a moment of silence. For me, that makes the occasional stay somewhere off-grid, where the only thing deafening is the silence, so special."

Solitude is the subject of Lonely Planet's latest book *The Joy of Quiet Places*. A comprehensive guide to the world's most



White Desert camp

serene places, it offers expert guidance and travel tips. In his foreword, the Norwegian explorer Erling Kagge, the first person to reach the South Pole solo and author of *Silence: In the Age of Noise: A meditation on the importance of silence in a world filled with noise and distractions*, writes: “Silence contains a quality more exclusive and long-lasting than the more ordinary luxuries.”

“Quiet is not a luxury – it is a human necessity,” argues acoustic ecologist and co-founder of Quiet Parks International, Gordon Hempton. Having spent the past three decades roaming rainforests, coastlines and deserts in order to record the sounds of nature, he’s one of the world’s leading experts on the subject. “Taking a break from noise is essential for your health. In quiet places, stress levels decrease, one can think more clearly, problems appear less

complex, people score higher on cognitive tests and they also become more creative and successful at home and work.”

Dr Laura Walton, a clinical psychologist and PADI Instructor, who has dedicated her career to studying the psychology of deep-sea diving is in firm agreement. “Descending into the depths on a scuba dive, one can only hear bubbles. The silence hushes the noise in our heads. Mind chatter reduces and we can focus on the present, paying attention to our dive and the environment around us. Many say diving is their therapy.”

Safari outfits are jumping on the bandwagon, too. “We’ve noticed growing demand for spa safaris and meditation safaris, which put the emphasis on wellness,” says Julian Carter-Manning, founder of Yellow Zebra Safaris, a travel company specialising in tailor-made expert-guided safaris across Africa. “We are

increasingly steering clients towards quieter, less-crowded destinations and activities that align with the quiet travel trend.”

At the more extreme (and colder) end of the spectrum, you’ll find White Desert, a carbon-neutral luxury camp outfit in Antarctica (accessible via private jet). Here, guests not only enjoy the privilege of total quiet (snow absorbs sound better than anything else), they get to experience what it feels like to be the only people on the planet. Let’s not overlook the exhilarating daily excursions, six-course gourmet meals and one-on-one sessions with an on-site biokineticist. Prices start from US\$68,500 per person for a six-day tour.

Not convinced? Let me leave you with this thought. In a truly quiet location, it’s possible to listen to more than 1,000 square miles at once. Sounds pretty cool, doesn’t it? ourhabitas.com, white-desert.com