



EXPERT-LED

ESCAPES

FROM CULINARY SAFARIS TO
CELESTIAL CRUISES, THESE 10 LUXURY
TRIPS OFFER TRAVELLERS ONE-OF-A-KIND
EXPERIENCES GUIDED BY SOME OF THE
WORLD'S MOST INSPIRING MINDS

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IMAGES: THE RITZ-CARLTON MALDIVES; QUARK EXPEDITIONS/MICHELLE SOLE;
PETROS TEKA; ALEJANDRA HAUSER; JANE TAMUNA; GETTY

1 TAKE PART IN A MASTER-LED HEALING RETREAT IN THE MALDIVES

My body is melting into a puddle of gold. In reality, I’m lying on the floor in a timber-clad room suspended over a sparkling Indian Ocean lagoon. Both sound far-fetched, but I’m at a master-led healing retreat in the Maldives, and scenarios like this have become my new normal.

I’ve travelled to The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands to spend four days with Susy Markoe Schieffelin, an LA-based sound healer, kundalini yoga teacher and reiki master, who’s in residence at the hotel as part of its Masters of Crafts programme. Over a lunch of spicy tuna poke bowls, looking out across a circular infinity pool, Susy explains the powerful healing qualities of sound. “As soothing frequencies created by the bowls wash over you, your brainwaves quickly and effortlessly shift into the deeply restorative alpha, theta or even delta states, similar to meditation or deep sleep,” she says. “This allows profound relaxation, emotional release and energetic realignment to happen effortlessly.” For Susy, years of suffering from anxiety, alcoholism and addiction had driven her to hit rock bottom. A chance opportunity to attend a group sound bath quite literally changed the course of her life. She quit her job in luxury hospitality, trained as a reiki master and started leading her own sound-healing experiences soon after. Fast forward eight years and millions of people have experienced her sound baths both online and in person. During the sessions, Susy uses her signature crystal bowls. “They’re made of 99.9% pure quartz crystal and infused with precious metals, gemstones and earth elements,” she tells me. “Each bowl creates frequencies that connect with either a chakra (an energy centre) or an endocrine gland, which produce hormones, supporting deep physical and emotional healing.” While most of her sessions are now held online, I get to enjoy the rare privilege of one-on-one time with Susy as part of my personalised retreat in the Maldives. This is how I end up making my way to the hotel’s halo-shaped spa, located across a slim boardwalk leading out into the ocean. A ring of circular overwater villas wraps around it like a cocoon, a design devised by renowned Australian firm Kerry Hill Architects and one that looks like it’s been dropped from space. After a short meditation and intention-setting session, I lie down on a mattress and Susy covers my eyes with a small pillow. As she starts to play her bowls, I quickly sink into a stupor, the

sound moving through me as if it’s massaging different parts of my body. I dip in and out of consciousness, unaware of time passing and unsure when Susy is playing the bowls or using the healing practice of reiki by moving her hands across my body. It’s as the sounds disappear into silence that my body melts to gold, my mind a lake of iridescent calm. A twinkling bell brings me back to the real world and as I sit up, Susy invites me to pull an oracle card from her deck. When I turn it over and see the word ‘gold’ spelled out in capital letters and an image of a figure basking in it, goosebumps erupt up my arms and tears prick my eyes. After a few months bogged down by self-doubt, it’s the reassuring sign I’ve been searching for — a reminder that I’m on the right path. Cycling back along the boardwalk and looking out at the translucent turquoise water that stretches out in every direction, I feel the lightest I have in months. I park my bike by my villa and plunge from its pontoon into the warm Maldivian waters before floating on my back beneath the vast bowl of periwinkle-blue sky. In between sessions with Susy, I experience other exclusive wellness offerings including an energising one-on-one yoga class with the island’s in-house yoga teacher, Kadek Suyadnya, and a balancing treatment at the Bamford spa, which combines bamboo tapping, *gua sha* (a skin-scraping treatment) and a traditional massage. A snorkelling trip to a nearby reef with the resort’s naturalist Olivia Forster almost feels like a moving meditation. While a passing storm buckets down above us, underwater everything is at peace, and we float serenely alongside turtles and an array of rainbow-coloured fish. On my last evening, I join a group sound-healing session with a difference. As opposed to the traditional approach of lying down, the nine of us are suspended in our own aerial yoga hammocks, strung from the ceiling of the fitness studio. In this cosy floating cocoon, I drop back into a similar restorative state to the one experienced in the individual session. The hour of sound passes in what feels like a flash and once again I leave feeling lighter and clearer, any creeping chatter in my mind washed away. On the plane back, I put my headphones in and listen to one of Susy’s recorded sessions on Spotify. The sounds transport me back to those moments of complete calm — a piece of Maldives’ magic coming home with me. **EB**

HOW TO DO IT: Ocean Pool Villas at The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands start from US\$1,520 (£1,124) per night. ritzcarlton.com

Clockwise from top: The circular architecture of the Ritz-Carlton Maldives is inspired by the traditional Maldivian Beru drum; overwater infinity pools provide sweeping Indian Ocean views; Susy Markoe uses crystal bowls, sound healing and reiki Previous pages, clockwise from top left: The Ritz-Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands offers an array of wellness programmes; Adélie penguins are among the most common in Antarctica; foraging is a big part of Kitchen in the Wild’s trips in Kenya; Mexico’s storied streets are best discovered with a local guide; the sounds of the ocean mingle with those of crystal bowls in the Maldives; the courtyard at the Silk Road Slippers writing retreat in Morocco; chef Valentine Warner loves cooking with seafood; Portugal’s Algarve region provides a soothing setting for meditation

IMAGES: THE RITZ-CARLTON MALDIVES, FARI ISLANDS



2 FEAST & FORAGE WITH A CELEBRATED CHEF ON SAFARI IN KENYA

In Laikipia County, where vast plains and shrubby savannahs are scattered with umbrella-shaped acacia trees, the landscape unfurls beneath the snow-capped peak of Mount Kenya. It's here that TV chef Valentine Warner and food events curator Clare Isaacs bring their culinary flair to the wild, hosting a one-of-a-kind supper club experience with an adventurous edge. Deep in the savannah, the duo gathers an intimate group of 18 guests for a five-day, feast-focused escape.

Learning about the land is at the heart of the trip. Alongside one of Kenya's leading botany experts, Valentine leads foraging expeditions into the bush, seeking out native ingredients and showing guests how to cook with them in inventive, locally inspired ways. Back at El Karama — a boutique, family-run safari lodge — guests roll up their sleeves to create dishes deeply rooted in Kenyan culinary traditions, from goat grilled over an open fire to greens sautéed with wild herbs, before dining banquet-style at long tables under a canopy of stars. Valentine, naturally, takes the lead, but food isn't his only obsession. "Born to fish, forced to work," he's joked on television more than once, so don't be surprised if you're roped into a fishing marathon at a nearby river, followed by a well-earned bankside picnic.

Beyond the kitchen, there's ample time for classic safari experiences, from game drives to spot the Big Five to quiet, fireside moments with your expert hosts-turned-campmates.

HOW TO DO IT: Kitchen in the Wild's next five-day culinary retreat at El Karama Lodge runs from 17-22 October 2025 and costs US\$12,000 (around £8,800) per person. kitcheninthewild.org



Clockwise from left: Al fresco dinners with fellow writers and authors in Morocco are a great opportunity to swap notes; guided beachside meditation with Deepak Chopra in Portugal; groups are small and intimate at Kitchen in the Wild's Kenyan odysseys; Valentine Warner holds cooking demonstrations deep in the African bush



IMAGES: SALAHEDDINE EL BOUAAICHI; TRAVELGEMS; PETROS TEKA

3 JOIN A SPIRITUAL REBOOT WITH A MEDITATION MASTER IN PORTUGAL

With his viral 21-day meditation challenge and 21 of his books making it onto *The New York Times*' bestseller list, Deepak Chopra has been at the forefront of the meditation revolution for decades. Through his teachings, he guides individuals to embrace inner strength, wisdom and the potential for personal growth. Five intimate days with the expert will likely leave you transformed, and in Portugal's Algarve region, against a backdrop of dramatic Atlantic beaches, a lucky few can do just that, spending one-on-one time with both Deepak and two leading experts from his team.

Daily sessions explore the connection between body, mind and the universe, diving into themes of joy and compassion. There's a mix of guided meditations, workshops and the use of AI technology designed to personalise the experience. Valuable Q&A sessions also invite participants to ask big questions about meaning, purpose and potential. Alongside all this, expect restorative yoga sessions with author and yoga master Sarah Platt-Finger and gratitude circles with transformational leadership expert Nika Smirni, as well as free time to explore Faro, take a cooking class or indulge in some wine-tasting.

HOW TO DO IT: TravelGems' Deepak Chopra Retreat starts from €5,950 (£5,141) per person, including accommodation at the W Algarve. travelgems.com

4 LEARN THE ART OF STORYTELLING FROM A TOP WRITING TEAM IN MARRAKECH

There's a saying that everyone has a book inside them, but actually writing one takes dedication and often a little help. Just a half-hour drive from the bustling souks of Marrakech, in a 15-acre private estate filled with book-lined rooms, Moorish arches and palm-shaded pools, you'll find that expert guidance. Here, Alexandra Pringle, former editor-in-chief of Bloomsbury Publishing, and a team that reads like a who's who of the literary world, are joined by a rotating cast of celebrated guest authors to hold a five-day course including hands-on exercises, immersive workshops and participatory sessions covering structure, character and voice. There's also free time to work on writing projects throughout the estate's picturesque nooks, whether it's under citrus trees in the gardens designed by ethnobotanist Gary Martin or with a glass of Moroccan mint tea amid the elegant North African interiors. Evenings are reserved for candlelit dinners and creative conversation with fellow writers, publishing experts and guest authors.

There are only 14 participants at a time, meaning there's ample space for individual attention, and at the retreat's close, each guest receives a one-on-one feedback session tailored to the next step in their writing journey.

HOW TO DO IT: Silk Road Slippers' five-day masterclasses cost £3,200 per person, plus accommodation costs. silkroadslippers.com





IMAGE: GETTY

Left: The Great Barrier Reef is the world’s largest living structure, so big it can be seen from space

5 DIVE THE GREAT BARRIER REEF WITH MASTER REEF GUIDES

The first time a giant trevally fish hits me on the forehead, I freeze. We’re 39ft below the surface of the ocean at dusk, the inky black water lit only by our torches. Thick with plankton, the beams cut through the white-speckled dark like headlights in a snowstorm. Enormous fish in their hundreds — silver, coral pink and coal black — all dart past my face, close enough to feel the chill of their scales on my skin.

I swing my torch into the abyss. Red, white and amber eyes blink back. Whitetip reef sharks — some the length of my arm, others larger than me — patrol the 98ft coral wall, their bellies swollen from a fresh kill. Moray eels crane their heads from deep cracks in brain and staghorn coral, teeth glinting in the light like knife blades. The only sounds are my short breaths and pounding heart as I kick my way through the feeding frenzy, praying my bubbles are enough to keep larger predators away.

It’s 7pm and I’m night diving off the coast of Queensland, miles from the mainland. We’ve been sailing for two days on *Spirit of Freedom*, a liveaboard boat bound for the white sands of Lizard Island at the far northern tip of the Great Barrier Reef, home to a world-renowned coral reef research station and a luxurious resort.

I’ve wanted to see the Great Barrier Reef since I was a child, largely thanks to the 2003 film *Finding Nemo*. But when I finally got the chance to visit earlier this year, I wasn’t sure what to expect. Wasn’t the reef dying? Would there be anything left to see? More importantly, would our presence here only add to the pressure on an already fragile ecosystem? I joined a three-night expedition to find out.

The morning after our night dive, we’re travelling deeper into the remote Ribbon Reefs — a chain of 10 coral formations stretching along the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef, far beyond the reach of day boats from Cairns or Port Douglas.

“The Ribbon Reefs have cooler currents and more resistant coral species,” says Mel Alps, the PADI master instructor leading our dives and one of four Master Reef Guides on board *Spirit of*

Freedom. “Out here, we’ve seen corals recover from cyclones and bleaching much faster than elsewhere on the Great Barrier Reef.”

Mel is one of the Great Barrier Reef’s 146 Master Reef Guides, an initiative created by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to help visitors better understand and protect the reef. To qualify, guides must have extensive local experience, work for an accredited eco-operator and complete rigorous training in reef ecology and conservation. As well as interpreting what we’re seeing underwater, they contribute to scientific monitoring and lead citizen science projects like Eye on the Reef, where recreational divers can contribute to research data by recording what they see.

For our dives off *Spirit of Freedom*, we’re handed waterproof slates to record sightings of key or invasive species, along with any visible bleaching or damage to coral. On a reef that’s roughly the size of Japan, this citizen-collected data helps scientists pinpoint which areas are healthiest, where threats like crown-of-thorns starfish are spreading and where conservation efforts should be focused next.

“Very few patrol boats come out this far,” says Mel. “That’s why tourism is so important to the Great Barrier Reef. It’s what allows us to be out in remote areas collecting data and reporting any illegal fishing boats.”

In recent years, Mel explains, there’s been a significant drop in visitor numbers to the Great Barrier Reef, threatening tourism-supported conservation efforts. “People think there’s nothing to see anymore, so they’re not coming,” says Mel. “That’s actually bad for the reef. Less tourism means fewer patrols, fewer surveys and less funding.”

The next day, we anchor at Lizard Island, 150 miles north of Cairns, where we’d started our journey four days ago. This densely forested and wildlife-rich island was once a sacred Aboriginal ceremonial site. Today, you’ll find the award-winning Lizard Island Resort, as well as Lizard Island Research Station, where scientists and naturalists from the around the world have





6 UNLOCK MEXICO CITY'S BEST-KEPT SECRETS WITH CREATIVE LOCALS

Creative to its core, Mexico City has long drawn artistic souls, from the bohemians of the early 20th century to today's contemporary designers, chefs and collectors. Now, a new kind of access is available: an immersive experience guided by some of the city's most influential insiders, offering a deeper, more personal look at the capital's cultural identity.

At the heart of it all is Cristina Kahlo, great-niece of Frida, who opens the doors of Casa Azul (the artist's iconic former home) for an exclusive, after-hours tour and tequila-tasting. In the surrounding neighbourhood of Coyoacán, another local expert leads a food pilgrimage through Frida's favourite haunts. And for a lucky few, Gabriela Ruiz, one of Mexico's most acclaimed chefs, welcomes travellers into her kitchen to cook and eat alongside her. Additionally, renowned art collector and antiques dealer Rodrigo Rivero Lake shares the stories behind his eclectic gallery, opening a window into Mexico's artistic past and present. These encounters form part of a tour offering behind-the-scenes access to places that few ever get to experience.

HOW TO DO IT: The Luminaire's five-night Feast on Mexican Masterpieces from Palate to Plate trip starts from £10,790 per person, including accommodation and all experiences. theluminaire.com

7 EXPLORE THE INDONESIAN SPICE ISLANDS WITH A MARINE HISTORIAN

Jeffrey Mellefont isn't your average tour guide. A seasoned blue-water mariner, celestial navigator and leading authority on seafaring history in Southeast Asia, he brims with a deep, lived knowledge of the ocean. His life's work has taken him across the Indonesian archipelago, researching traditional navigation and maritime culture. On this expedition to the Maluku Islands, he's not just a guide, he's a living link to the past, offering a singular perspective on the history, landscapes and marine life of one of the world's most storied regions.

These fertile isles were once the world's only source of cloves, nutmeg and mace, which earned them the name the Spice Islands. On this 12-day voyage from Ambon to Ternate, travellers will sail aboard a traditional wooden *phinisi* ship, following ancient routes once navigated by spice traders.

Days are split between land and sea. On shore, activities include climbing jungle-draped volcanoes, visiting nutmeg plantations and spotting rare endemic wildlife, while in the water, time is spent snorkelling with whale sharks and manta rays and exploring coral reefs.

HOW TO DO IT: SeaTrek's 12-day SeaTrek to the Scents of the Spice Islands trip starts from US\$9,850 (£7,290) per person, full board. seatrekbali.com

come to study and document the reef since 1973. Staff tell me that Sir David Attenborough — who first visited the island in 1957 and has made several return trips, including one to film parts of wildlife documentary series *Blue Planet II* — said this was his favourite place on Earth. I find out exactly why over the next three days. I dive with potato cod, spot giant clams and turtles and watch dolphins breach the surface of the water from an empty beach teeming with lizards and backed by swaying palms. This is an island that truly feels like paradise.

As I fly back to Cairns in a tiny propeller plane — the only way in or out of Lizard Island other than by private boat — I begin to grasp the true scale of the Great Barrier Reef. From up here, it's mind-bogglingly vast, but also heartbreaking and beautiful. A wave of sadness rises at the thought of it disappearing. Even with the cooler, more resilient waters of the Ribbon Reefs, scientists warn the Great Barrier Reef is struggling to cope with rising ocean temperatures and may soon reach a tipping point.

But for Mel and the other Master Reef Guides I met aboard *Spirit of Freedom*, there's still hope for the world's largest reef system — as long as we continue to fight for it.

“Yes, parts of the Great Barrier Reef are struggling, but it's still a living, breathing coral reef,” says Mel. “The best thing you can do to save it is to see it for yourself.” **JV**

HOW TO DO IT: *Spirit of Freedom* offers three-, four- and seven-night liveaboard dive trips on the Great Barrier Reef departing from Cairns. Cabins start from A\$2,679 (£1,286) for a standard twin or double on a three-night trip, including meals and snacks. Full equipment hire is available at an extra cost. Standard doubles at Lizard Island start from A\$2,516 (£1,208) a night (two-night minimum stay), including all meals. spiritoffreedom.com.au lizardisland.com.au

DID YOU KNOW?
STRETCHING ALMOST 1,500 MILES, THE GREAT BARRIER REEF IS SO VAST THAT ONLY 20% IS CURRENTLY SURVEYED. THE MARINE PARK AUTHORITY RELIES ON TOURISM, WHICH GENERATES MORE THAN £6M ANNUALLY FOR REEF CONSERVATION

From left: You can spot six of the world's seven species of turtle in the Great Barrier Reef, including the endangered hawksbill turtle; Master Reef Guides help visitors better understand and protect the reef; Mexico City's Coyoacán neighbourhood is renowned for its cobblestone streets and colourful facades; nutmeg is still harvested by hand on Indonesia's Spice Islands

IMAGES: GETTY; ALEJANDRA HAUSER; SEATREK SAIL ADVENTURES



8 MEET ANTARCTICA'S PENGUIN POPULATION 8 WITH A WORLD-REOWNED ORNITHOLOGIST

For the explorer Ernest Shackleton, it was the glory of reaching the South Pole that brought him to Antarctica. For polar polymath Fabrice Genevois, it was something far less dangerous: penguins.

And so, 150 miles south of the Antarctic Circle, as we land on the shore of Red Rock Ridge, Fabrice announces it's time to get obsessed with the flightless birds ourselves. "Keep quiet," he whispers, offering instructions as we transfer from boat to wintry shore. "Go slow, and don't be alarmed if they get too close. They've never seen people before."

The temperature has dropped to -10C. Hats are pulled down and collars zipped tight as we clamber over ice slicks, an unlikely welcoming party dressed in bright yellow waterproofs. To one side, the cliffs of the Black Mountains rise stark above a bay dotted with icebergs the size of container ships. To the other, a pure white promontory is besieged by light winds, heavy snow drifts and hundreds of pairs of curious Adélie penguins. "They're very inquisitive," Fabrice announces, eyes twinkling. "There's always something interesting to see."

The French ornithologist is a casting agent's idea of an Antarctic guide: wild-eyed, white-haired, wearing rock star sunglasses and a vintage jacket rather than a life vest or hat, despite the plunging cold and perils of driving a rigid inflatable boat in rough waters. Fabrice began his love affair with seabirds as a researcher on the far-flung subantarctic Kerguelen Islands. Since then, he's published numerous books on seabird biology and ecology and calls this frozen land of fjords and glaciers his second home.

Fabrice's experiences have led him to work as a lecturer and guide for Quark Expeditions, a polar expedition company

that, since 1991, has pioneered Antarctica tourism, including completing the first commercial circumnavigation of the continent. Somewhat inevitably, the Frenchman has become the go-to avian specialist on board. As Fabrice puts it: "A day without a penguin is a bad one. But rest assured, you won't be disappointed."

During the expedition, learnings come thick and fast, both from Fabrice and the army of other experts on board, from glaciologists and geologists to geographers and marine biologists. I'm shocked to discover crabeater seals are misnamed (there are no foolhardy crabs in Antarctica), and that leopard seals can eat up to 15 penguins a day. The Gentoos making up a large portion of these feasts were named by British sailors who thought their white head markings resembled turbans (Europeans often used the word 'gentoo' to refer to people on the Indian subcontinent before Hindu became the more common term). Meanwhile, Antarctic shags stick so close to the coastline that it's said early explorers — including Shackleton and Captain James Cook — used them as living compasses. There's so much to be curious about, and it's impossible not to hang on every word uttered by the team.

With the luxury of the light-filled austral summer, we encounter parts of Antarctica few travellers here ever see, dropping anchor at a succession of islands. Happily for Fabrice, there are penguins aplenty, but we also meet elephant seals roaring on beaches, step onto ice floes, watch leopard seals on the hunt and stare mesmerised at a pair of orcas moving beneath our boat like a carousel.

In Antarctica, the weather can flip faster than almost anywhere on Earth — it's not unusual for skies to be clear one minute and a blizzard to blow in the next

IMAGE: QUARK EXPEDITIONS/MICHELLE SOLE



THE INTERVIEW
Helicopter pilot Jonny Mutch on navigating the ends of the Earth

WHAT’S IT LIKE TO FLY IN ANTARCTICA?
It’s a remote, challenging part of the planet, and we need to be able to make decisions based on ever-changing conditions. We have to resist the temptation to get too close to anything. The landscape does the talking here, and it’s so unpredictable you never know what might happen.

WHERE’S AN EXTRA SPECIAL PLACE TO LAND?
Snow Hill Island. It’s snowcapped and the weather makes it very tricky. Pilots can land twice in two days, but it can then take two weeks to get there again. There’s a great sense of achievement, as so few have ever landed there.

WHAT’S BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE WHILE FLYING A HELICOPTER IN ANTARCTICA?
Witnessing a huge glacial calving from above. It was a mile-wide slab that collapsed into a bay, creating a huge washing machine of water and tumbling ice. It was a pure ‘wow’ moment.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR ANTARCTICA?
I’m a cautious advocate for heli-tourism. Every flight is scrutinised for wildlife avoidance and we always minimise impact, climbing higher or moving away swiftly. We know the impact we have on ecosystems, but, equally, it’s important for people to learn about this environment so we can protect it.



One morning, marine biologist Nick Engelmann and I find ourselves speechless, surrounded by a pod of humpbacks, their barnacle-covered flukes brushing against the side of our rigid inflatable as they swoop beneath us. “The unpredictability keeps bringing me back,” he says later, a brilliant sun shining overhead. “You just never know what you’re going to see and there’s always more to learn.”

Out on the top deck of our expedition ship on our final night, as it charts a silent course back to civilisation, guests gather alongside the expedition team, including Fabrice. This evening, he’s traded his down jacket for a penguin suit of another kind: a sharp blazer and tie. He looks dapper, but there’s a flicker of melancholy in his eyes as he gazes out at the infinite white, now trailing behind us. “I long for this place when I’m not here,” he says softly, “because, as you now know, a day without a penguin is a bad day.”

For so long, the word often paired with Antarctica has been ‘struggle’. But for those of us standing here, hushed beneath a bruised polar sky, the seventh continent feels more like a place of awakening; a place of high adventure, untamed beauty and mystery. We’ve learned about this hidden world, felt its vastness, heard it crack and breathe and now we wonder: how does one go back to their ordinary life once you’ve locked eyes with a leopard seal? Walked where icebergs are born? Or stood, grinning, in the company of a thousand tuxedoed birds? **MM**

HOW TO DO IT: Quark Expeditions offers a 12-day Antarctica by Helicopter: Icebergs, Mountains and Remote Lands from \$13,432 (£9,930) per person. The trip includes return charter flights from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia, full-board accommodation, transfers & helicopter trips. [quarkexpeditions.com](https://www.quarkexpeditions.com)

Clockwise from above: During breeding season, Adélie penguins march hundreds of miles to reach their colonies; Egypt has famously clear skies, perfect for eclipse-chasers; Keukenhof is one of the largest flower gardens in the world

IMAGES: QUARK EXPEDITIONS/MICHELLE SOLE; ALAMY; GETTY



9 MARVEL AT A SOLAR ECLIPSE WITH ASTRONOMY EXPERTS IN EGYPT

The longest total solar eclipse of our collective lifetime will take place in July 2027, and Luxor is being hailed as one of the best places on Earth to witness this rare celestial event. As the Moon passes between the Earth and the Sun, it will block the Sun’s light for a remarkable six continuous minutes of total darkness — a spectacle unlikely to be matched for generations. To experience the central line of totality in all its glory, precise positioning is key. That’s why four leading experts in eclipse science and astronomy are steering a course along the Nile, inviting travellers to join them aboard the *MS Opera*, a luxurious yet low-key river vessel. The languid 10-day cruise will sail from Aswan to Luxor, docking deep in the desert under Egypt’s famously clear skies and offering front-row seats of this once-in-a-lifetime moment. Both astronomy novices and avid eclipse-chasers are welcome aboard, where the expert team will share insights on pre- and post-eclipse briefings, plus expert-led lectures on topics ranging from solar photography to astronomy. Moreover, as travellers journey from Aswan to Luxor, the academics will dive deep into how astronomy and eclipses intersect with Egyptian archaeological history, with regular stop-offs to visit archaeological sites such as Valley of the Kings, Karnak and the Temple of Luxor.

HOW TO DO IT: This exclusive 10-day expedition with New Scientist Tours departs on 27 July 2027 and includes return flights, accommodation and guided excursions. Prices start from £5,699. [newscientist.com](https://www.newscientist.com)

10 EXPERIENCE THE NETHERLANDS’ BLOOMS WITH A CELEBRITY GARDENER

Each spring, as the Netherlands shakes off its winter chill, its flower fields burst into a vibrant patchwork of reds, purples and yellows. It’s a sight that never gets old for Adam Frost, a RHS Chelsea Flower Show-winning garden designer, *Gardeners’ World* presenter and an RHS Ambassador for Education. Adam’s accreditations are endless, and such is his love for the Netherlands’ blooms that he hosts a yearly trip there, giving travellers the chance to learn from him while witnessing the North Rhine at its most beautiful. For guests on board the *A-ROSA Sena*, the experience begins in Cologne before stopping in three of the Netherlands’ most-loved cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht. There’s plenty of time on board to chat to Adam about his near-endless gardening knowledge, whether it’s in relation to the Dutch spring blooms, flowers in general or tips for gardens back home. As well as hosting horticulture-themed talks and intimate Q&As, Adam also accompanies travellers to Keukenhof botanical garden for an exclusive private tour. This sprawling masterpiece has become known as the ‘Garden of Europe’ and spans nearly 80 acres. Spring sees the park at its most spectacular, with a carpet of rainbow colours created by the seven million tulips, hyacinths and daffodils set in a landscape of lakes, trees and pavilions. **Q**

HOW TO DO IT: This five-night river cruise with TripSmiths starts from £1,599 per person, including accommodation, excursions and exclusive access to Keukenhof. [tripsmiths.com](https://www.tripsmiths.com)

