

# Robb Report

33rd ANNUAL

## BEST OF THE BEST

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LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

## SPECIALISTS

Travel specialists have never been more essential than they are right now, with their invaluable ability to pivot, re-book and offer advice. We picked 10 standouts in the luxury field from across the world, a directory of those who embody that above-and-beyond spirit essential in the past year.

### CHRISTOPHER WILMOT-SITWELL

Cazenove + Loyd

Wilmot-Sitwell has been working in travel for more than three decades. The co-owner of a 16-person London-based agency specializes in long-haul luxury, often to far-flung sites in rural Africa and Asia. The team there spent much of 2020 canceling or postponing trips—most recently, unpicking rescheduled itineraries to the Tokyo Olympics when a ban on foreign spectators was announced.

The firm anticipated today's conscious-travel concerns from the outset, always focusing on owner-run and locally staffed independent operations, such as preservation outfit Campfire in Zimbabwe. Cazenove + Loyd also offers the entire carbon cost of its research recesses via a partnership with CommuniTree, a 12-square-mile tropical reforestation project in Nicaragua. Clients can easily opt into this, too; anyone whose itinerary swoops through the country can visit the project and personally plant the trees.

### TANYA DALTON

Managing director UK, Greaves

Dalton leads the UK office of this India specialist outfitter, which was founded by her Mumbai-born grandfather in 1978 and later run by her mother. With generations' worth of in-depth experience and exclusive connections at her fingertips, she arranges

custom trips as luxe as they are immersive. Depending on their interests, travelers may find themselves granted entrée to private palaces, sacred religious sites and landmarked government buildings; meeting with celebrated curators, authors, artisans, jewelers, chefs or astrologers; or exploring desert wilds while staying at plush mobile camps.

Dalton's team—45 in Delhi and Mumbai, and 15 in the UK—helped extract some 40 clients from India at the start of the pandemic, as borders closed. Now she's helping guests plan their return. On her radar currently are safaris to spot India's rising tiger population, top-end hotel openings in Rajasthan and a new single-suite wooden boat that's perfect for privately cruising the Ganges, Bhagirathi and Hooghly Rivers.

### JULES MAURY

Scott Dunn Private

Maury runs this offshoot of the UK-based travel firm, focused entirely on bespoke itineraries. Much of her work during the pandemic involved extended stays for home-schooling families who were looking to live and work in a new locale, whether spending two and a half months at Gili Lankanfushi in the Maldives or a month in residence at Antigua's Jumby Bay. Another guest commandeered the five-room Sheldon Chalet in Denali National Park, an ultra-secluded property accessible only by a 45-minute helicopter ride.

The SDP team follows multiple pro-social protocols when it travels and



Beks Ndlovu

encourages clients to follow suit, including the Pack for a Purpose program, in which visitors pack requested supplies in their luggage for distribution at the destination. It's laser-focused on ethical practices, too. Animal welfare is a priority, so providers that offer bullfighting or elephant riding are not used, and there's a pledge that 90 percent of all operators will not provide single-use plastics to guests by the end of 2023.

### DEBORAH CALMEYER

Roar Africa

The Zimbabwe-born Calmeyer has carved out a discrete niche as the ultimate elite safari planner, with the ability to pull off near-impossible requests, even during the pandemic. Rwanda's government requires a negative PCR Covid-19 test for visitors, but offers only the throat-swab version at Kigali airport—a problem for one Roar Africa client, desperate to go gorilla-trekking but phobic about anything touching his throat. Calmeyer set up a protocol change, arranging for a nose swab to be administered instead.

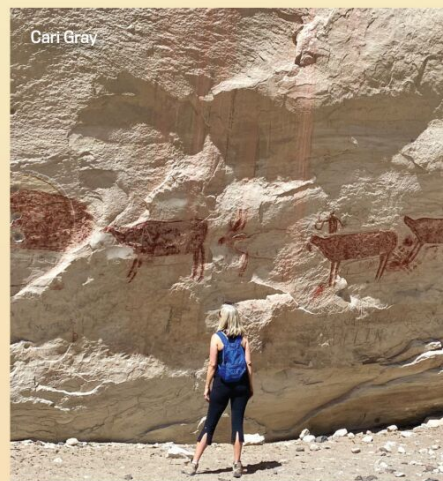
She has offices in Nairobi, Johannesburg and Cape Town, with the HQ in New York, and Roar Africa continued to pay drivers, freelance guides and its staff even during lockdown, as governmental support in situ was scant. Roar Africa supports several social programs, including an all-women anti-poaching academy in Kenya, which has so far graduated almost 30 fully trained rangers, and underwrites a scholarship at a college of tourism in South Africa that trains women to work at local hotels and lodges.

### CATHERINE HEALD

Remote Lands

Remote Lands' expertise centers entirely on planning ultra-luxury trips for Americans to Asia, with offices in New York and Bangkok, plus country managers in every locale.

Heald and business partner Jay Tindall try to ensure a positive impression both for their guests and by them, encouraging clients, for example, to fund the digging of a water well for a local family



Cari Gray



Deborah Calmeyer

whenever Siem Reap in Cambodia forms part of the itinerary. Conscious of the higher carbon footprint of itineraries that span the continent, the pair deliberately minimize the number of flights, private or commercial.

Last year, a Texas couple who were planning to go solo to Asia to celebrate both his 70th birthday and their 40th wedding anniversary had to postpone, and instead Heald helped them turn their three-week, four-country trip into a reunion with their grandchildren, whom they plan to take along this November.



Tanya Dalton

**BEKS NDLOVU**  
**Founder of African Bush Camps**

Ndlovu has maintained momentum, despite the safari industry's devastating year. The operator and hotelier kept his entire 600-person staff employed while also unveiling Khwai Leadwood, a new high-design lodge in Botswana's Okavango Delta. It's the latest in his eco-conscious properties; he has rolled out 16 of them in 15 years across three countries, a remarkable achievement. Each has a light footprint, via solar farms and water recycling, while also offering direct support to surrounding communities via the company's ABC Foundation.

Even amid the logistical and medical constraints of the past year, Ndlovu seamlessly pulled off a recent journey for 14 people to Zimbabwe via private plane. "There was a lot of juggling, but it was well worth it," says Ndlovu, who advocates for guests to spend their tourism dollars with brands that preserve wilderness areas and empower minorities and

locals. "We continue to make the effort in identifying key talent that we can support and help rise to the surface."

**CÉDRIC REVERSADE & PAUL-MAXIME KOSKAS**  
**Unique Properties & Events**

Luxury travel was already tilting toward villa rentals before the pandemic made the idea of privacy, and self-containment, even more appealing. The London- and Paris-based Reversade and business partner Koskas offer discreet access to the world's best rental homes in hot spots like Saint-Tropez, Ibiza and Capri while also acting as a travel concierge.

Take the California client who had bought a *piano nobile* on the Grand Canal in Venice, just before the first lockdown—and for whom they managed to secure a visa even when borders were shut. They also arranged excursions in the city, like a day on Burano with the glassblowers and a night visit to San Marco. Or the polo-loving English client who ditched her Chelsea townhouse for a seafront

James Jayasundera



estate in Ibiza they'd wrangled on her behalf as lockdowns loomed; she then took trips around Spain, including lunching with a retired rejeonador from whom she bought two horses to ride at her country estate.

**CARI GRAY**  
**Gray & Co.**

Based in Santa Monica, Calif., Canadian expat Gray runs a lean team of about 10 with a particular expertise in active luxury. Take the trip to Argentina and Uruguay which shuttled her guests between cycling spots by private jet. It was due to start just as Argentina shuttered its borders last March, so Gray's team pivoted, re-booking the group on a similar itinerary in California within 24 hours.

She's determined that the lavish sums spent by clients truly uplift every destination, especially in developing areas. One pair of travelers sponsored GPS collars on a research project for rescued elephants at a local animal reserve in Namibia and witnessed the process firsthand. And an always recommended pit stop in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco is one of the late Eve Branson's projects, which employs local women making crafts. It isn't all do-gooding, though: Gray is renowned for arranging Michelin-caliber chefs to cater alfresco at the end of a day's hiking.



Cédric Reversade, left, and Paul-Maxime Koskas

**JAMES JAYASUNDERA**  
**Ampersand Travel**

Sri Lanka is one of the rare destinations in Asia that have managed to create a program that allows visitors to experience the country during the pandemic, and no one is a better expert to help navigate an itinerary in that new normal than Rome-raised Jayasundera and his five-person, almost two-decade-old firm. Visitors can stay in designated hotels, he explains, and even go sightseeing, as long as they remain in "bio bubbles" to protect the local populace from imported infection.

Jayasundera started early, noting the preferences of each of his 12-strong family as they traveled constantly in his childhood, and has made such attention to detail a hallmark of his commercial operation. Inclusivity is a longtime passion, with a strong presence in the LGBTQ community among both staff and clients, and efforts to use female guides where possible to offset challenges around equality.

**MARK DUGUID**  
**Carrier**

The 60-person, Manchester-based Carrier plans less than 5,000 trips per year, allowing it to retain a reputation for flexibility. It's willing to change itineraries within hours of departure and never charging amending fees. Duguid and his team were well placed, then, for the challenges of last year: See the couple from the UK who seized the chance to travel when permitted during a break in lockdowns, heading impromptu to the Maldives as an add-on to a last-minute visit to Dubai. Carrier recognized the appeal of the outdoors for travelers in the last year, too, and created an exclusive trip to Octola in Finland's Arctic Circle, a five-star private wilderness reserve where local guides hosted open-fire lunches and ran excursions on husky sleds and snowmobiles.

Duguid reports a surge in so-called revenge spending, noting that the average booking value for 2021 has risen 90 percent year over year, with clients indulging in once-in-a-lifetime trips after lockdown restrictions loosen.