



ULTIMATE GLAMPING ADVENTURES FOR 2013

CECILY MABASA recommends some of the most luxurious adventure trips around the globe



My mother once told me I was born with roller skates on my feet. While all my sisters wanted Barbie dolls, I wanted picture books on the Seven Wonders of the World. This gives you an idea of how I ended up with a passion for adventure travel around the globe.

So over the past decade, I traded in my “It” bag, heels, and lipstick for an Arcteryx all-weather jacket, a Patagonia day pack, and quick-dry capilene t-shirts. My quest was to find the most unique and yet luxurious experiences in the world’s unexplored destinations.

Here, I have curated what I feel have been the best journeys I have traversed in utmost luxury. Places where the saying “photos speak louder than words” best describes their majestic splendor.

EVEREST PANORAMA, HIMALAYAS, NEPAL

Until a few years ago, trekking through the Everest panorama region meant staying in tents or tea houses with shared bathrooms and dormitory-style rooms. Squatting in the bushes in below-zero degree temperatures was not my idea of a holiday but an Everest trek was something I really had to do. So when I chanced upon information on the existence of luxury lodges in the Everest region, I immediately booked my flight out to Lukla.

I must stress though that luxury here is by no means up to international standards. For an area as remote and poor as this, however, where a hot shower is rare, this was akin to a five-star hotel. The difficult trek and high altitude made the small, extra comforts a welcome treat after a hard day on the trails.

We had our own room with a heater, electricity to charge the various electronic devices we couldn't live without, a soft mattress with heated blankets, and a bathroom with hot showers.

We immersed ourselves in a place rich in tradition and culture, as we journeyed from village to village. At every turn, we were greeted by sensational scenery and surrounded by the Himalayan views of Everest and the prominent peaks of Ama Dablam, Lhotse, and Nuptse.

Best time to go: September to December. Avoid the rainy season at all costs.

ALASKA INNER PASSAGE ADVENTURE

This adventure coined a new catch word in water adventure: the "un-cruise experience," which means to explore remote places in the inner passages of Alaska in an upscale yacht or small expedition boat with only 30 like-minded adventurers. You get to see the real Alaska and its wildlife at eye level and not from the deck of your ship.

Our luxurious yacht meandered through the largest national forest in the United States--home to grizzly bears, black bears, mountain goats, bald eagles, and wolves. On our way to view Alaska's massive glaciers, we entered some of the world's deepest fjords to hike and kayak. Each day we got to kayak, paddle board, hike on shore and on glaciers, sip cocktails on deck as the sun set, and enjoy sit-down dinners while watching dolphins and the great whales.

My favorite experiences included taking photos of grizzly bears feeding on salmon from a hundred meters, feeding whales as they breached in and out of the water for hours, paddle boarding with sea lions swimming by my side, and traversing the different landscapes—from ice and spongy tundras, to forests where bears lived.

Best time to go: May to early September. I highly recommend booking at least half a year in advance.



SUMMITTING KILIMANJARO, TANZANIA

I summited the Roof of Africa at 5,950 meters a month ago. It was quite surreal and the most exhilarating adventure I have ever done.

Mt. Kilimanjaro is a holy grail in any adventurer's bucket list. Based on statistics, less than 50% of climbers make it to the summit. Simply making it to the summit is a feather on any explorer's cap and I couldn't refuse such a challenge.

Although people mostly talk about the summit experience, the road to the summit is a highlight on its own. I highly recommend doing the route less traversed – the Lemosho route is remote and spectacular, and it boasts of dramatic gorges and priceless views of west Kilimanjaro.

For years, I pushed off doing this as I knew the challenges. Though not a technical climb, there are no luxury lodges along the way. Furthermore, it's a difficult terrain and no company will guarantee you summiting, especially because of the high altitude.

But this year, I stacked the decks in my favor through research and planned a private expedition with one of the best operators. We had one guide per person, a slew of porters, big standing tents with mattresses, and the best down-filled, fleece-lined sleeping bags.

Best time to go: June to October is the driest time of the year, giving you clear skies and the best views.

GETTING THERE

Cecily Mabasa traveled with the luxury adventure group Sea to Summit Explorations' custom-made journeys.

www.seatosummitadv.net