



Memory Lane

Luxury travel is clearly shifting from a one-track focus on high-end hotels with their extravagant spas and sophisticated restaurants to being more about rare and elusive experiences. Here are a few expert tips to head you in the right direction.

Authenticity is about uncovering those places, and their people, that are blissfully disparate from our daily grind; it's about telling stories and fostering an appreciation for the natural world, for timeless cultures, for home-grown traditions, and for time-honoured hospitality.

As a restless world wanderer, I must admit that it's not the big brand names, the glamorous celebrity guests, or heavy hitting social media campaigns that compel me to travel. If I were to put it in a nutshell, when I travel, I'm looking for one main thing: authenticity.

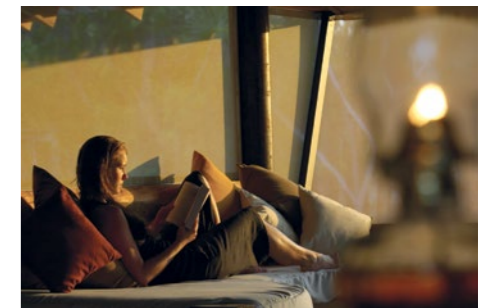
The word might mean many things to many people but I've always found that a dictionary definition (Merriam-Webster, in this case) – 'true to one's own personality, spirit, or character' – does capture the word's true essence. Authenticity is about uncovering those places, and their people, that are blissfully disparate from our daily grind; it's about telling stories and fostering an appreciation for the natural world, for timeless cultures, for home-grown traditions, and for time-honoured hospitality.

Fortunately, hoteliers and travel companies around the globe are also tuning into this resurgence towards elegant simplicity, a back-to-the-roots kind of approach, heralding an end to

the 'Miami Vice' era of luxury travel – a time of ostentatious consumption, poolside complacency, and cultural ignorance. It was an era when travelling in a perfectly cloistered bubble was the norm. Not anymore.

I write this from the comfort of the Rhodes Suite at Otahuna, a luxury lodge housed in a beautifully preserved, heritage-listed mansion on the outskirts of Christchurch, in **New Zealand's** South Island. New Zealand is a major example of a destination that does authenticity to perfection. Sure, there are the hotel chains in the city, with their loyalty schemes and power lunch menus but you don't have to delve far into the postcard perfect countryside to find the cutting-edge in the luxury travel scene here.

The country's luxury lodge movement began with simple fishing cottages nestled on New Zealand's top salmon and trout streams. As affluent anglers ventured to these remote spots, they brought with them a taste for the finer things in life, and a gradual



Here and opposite: Bamurru Plains is an upmarket safari lodge in Australia's Top End. Located just to the west of Kakadu National Park on the Mary River floodplains, you'll find an abundance of bird and wildlife in this remote and beautiful wilderness.



evolution took place. Today, lodges like Otahuna, Blanket Bay, Matakauri, Huka, Treetops and Minaret marry world-class cuisine – food that’s intrinsically linked to the destination through the property’s own gardens or through trusted local producers – with lavish accommodation and stunning locations. These lodges become extensions of the place in which they operate, and exist in a sustainably symbiotic relationship with the landscapes, cultures and local communities to which their guests are seduced.

Australia is also a destination that has been quick to cater to authenticity in travel. Its incredibly varied landscapes and the inherent innovation and down-to-earth hospitality of its people, ensure luxurious experiences available nowhere else in the world. From the tented suites of Bamurru Plains, located on the flood plains of the Northern Territory’s Mary River, to Arkaba Station, a traditional homestead in the heart of the Flinders Ranges, to its thrilling train journeys, which reach across Australia’s sunburnt flanks, the Land Down Under has no shame in placing itself front and centre for travellers seeking an authentic Aussie journey.

Finally, a destination that has authenticity at its very core is **Myanmar**, a nation that’s only recently come in from the cold. Luxury travel companies like Belmond, operators of the acclaimed Road to Mandalay and the Orcaella, were quick to establish themselves on Burma’s mighty rivers, vital waterways that connected remote cities and communities in a destination that has little infrastructure. These luxurious expeditionary river cruisers, and those that are set to arrive in the coming years, from lines like Scenic Cruises, AMA Waterways and Sanctuary Retreats, offer intrepid travellers a chance to get under the skin of this ancient land, meet its people on their own terms, delve into the rich fabric of Burma’s history, religion and culture, and experience a style of travel that’s true to their own personality, spirit, or character. **B**



Opposite: Akaroa Harbour is an hour’s drive, over the crater rim of an extinct volcano, from New Zealand’s Otahuna Lodge. It offers the opportunity to swim with the world’s rarest and smallest dolphins, take forest and hillside walks, cruise on a classic sailing yachts or kayak to remote sea caves. **Above:** For a glimpse of old Indochina, there isn’t a more eye-opening destination than Myanmar, which only recently began allowing tourists in. The Sanctuary Ananda cruises its Irrawaddy River.