

Authentic Luxury Travel

Fun For Us, Good For The World

If you follow travel trends, you know that the current buzz is all about “authentic luxury travel.” Thoughtful travelers everywhere are savoring local cultures without sacrificing comfort. I’m really excited about this concept because it has the potential to change the world. It’s not that I had anything against “babymoos” (last year’s hot topic), but changing the world — well, that’s really a good thing.

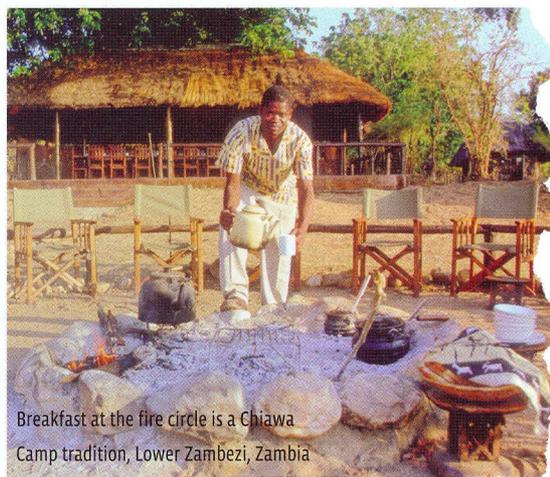
Authentic Travel

For decades, many Americans were satisfied with looking at foreign destinations through the windows of a tour bus, but today’s conscientious traveler wants to interact with local people, explore new cultures, and wander off the typical tourist track.

You only have to look at the trips offered by Abercrombie & Kent to see what I mean. This top-notch travel company prides itself in “combining comfort and authenticity.” Tour members can “participate in a food-offering ceremony with Buddhist monks in Bangkok, explore the citadel of Machu Picchu in the company of its resident archaeologist, or end a perfect day on safari with a five-course banquet under the stars.” (www.abercrombiekent.com)

Similarly, guests of Bushtracks Expeditions stay in “authentic safari lodging that reflects the destination’s culture and history, as well as Bushtracks’ high standard of comfort.” As with many travel companies today, Bushtracks makes it easy for its participants to support programs that benefit the community. (www.bushtracks.com)

Of course, authentic travel doesn’t always involve the Third World. New Zealand is famous for its luxurious country lodges, but I sometimes opt to stay on a farm, where I feel closer to the heart of the country. Historically, New Zealand farmers have controlled much of the country’s

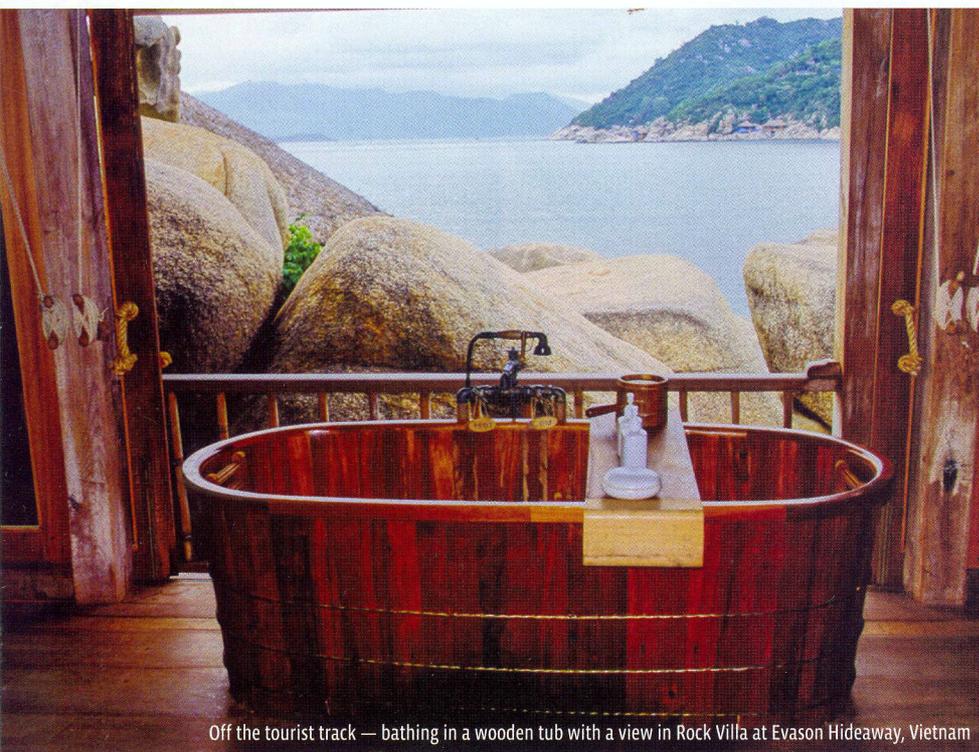


Breakfast at the fire circle is a Chiawa Camp tradition, Lower Zambezi, Zambia

wealth, and many homesteads are furnished with valuable antiques and Oriental rugs. However, the real benefit of a farm stay is interacting with hosts on a one-to-one basis.

Authentic travel can happen anywhere because it’s more about attitude than it is about location. If we seize the opportunity to share who we are, learn about other cultures, and embrace the differences, we foster goodwill. Isn’t that what the world needs now?

Chain hotels rarely provide an entrée to a community the way locally-owned lodging can. In Montana’s Glacier National Park, the big lodges are usually chockablock with bus tour patrons, so we always stay at



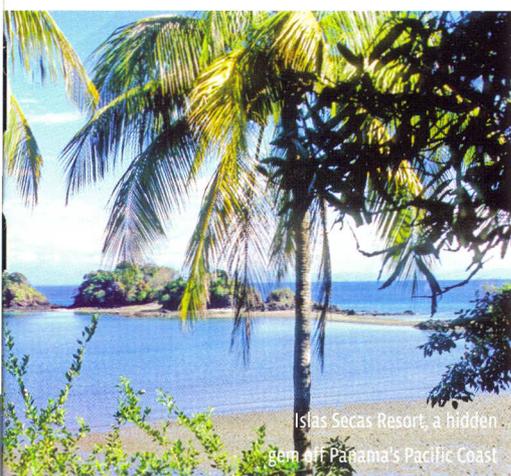
Off the tourist track — bathing in a wooden tub with a view in Rock Villa at Evason Hideaway, Vietnam

Apgar Village Lodge in West Glacier. Here, from our homey cabin, we overlook McDonald Creek and can easily wander down to Lake McDonald to watch the sun set — glass of wine in hand. Apgar Village Inn, a two-story motel right on the edge of Lake McDonald, is another good alternative.

Luxury Travel

In addition to spacious quarters, high-thread count linens, agreeable service, and a full complement of facilities, my definition of luxury travel includes a flexible schedule, the ability to be spontaneous, and the indulgence of not having to start the day at the crack of dawn. In other words, I don't go on tours or cruises.

I would rather spend an inordinate amount of time learning about the destination, planning the trip, and booking hotels — and then travel solo or *a deux* with my husband or a friend. To take the pain out of early-morning departures, I'm inclined to stay at airport hotels — the Fairmont Hotel at Vancouver Airport being the best of these. (www.fairmont.com/vancouverairport)



Islas Secas Resort, a hidden gem on Panama's Pacific Coast



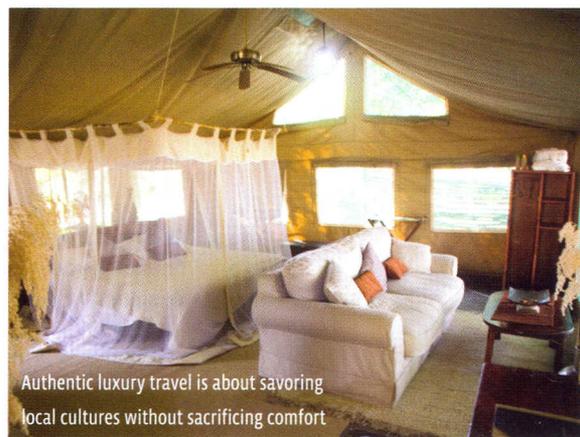
Off the beaten path in Canada's Gulf Islands — Hastings House Country Estate

Every traveler has his/her own idea about what constitutes a luxury experience — and yours might be quite different from mine. However, I bet we agree on one thing: traveling in economy class is not luxurious.

To deal with the high cost of business and first, I have learned to watch for discounted fares (www.johnnyjet.com is a good source). In addition, I track the airlines' special promotions. Top-rated Emirates announces a new deal every Tuesday at www.emirates.com/spotlight. A recent offer was two-for-one first class tickets to any of its 100 destinations.

I also stretch my frequent flyer miles as far as they will go and watch them like a hawk. In 2007, 39 billion miles expired in frequent flyer accounts, which is my definition of a crying shame.

Like other authentic luxury travelers, I want to explore the



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road less traveled, meet local people, and have real experiences. I'm happiest doing these things when I don't have to sacrifice comfort and convenience. However, the greatest pleasures are reflecting on the excitement of a genuine connection and savoring the flavors of goodwill.

To read about some of my favorite authentic luxury travel destinations, visit the "Luxury Travel" blog on www.ranchandcoast.com.

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