

The tents on Scott Dunn's Dhorpatan Wilderness Trail in Nepal are supplied with fresh linen

Star treks

Trekking gets glamorous, with luxury tents, off-map hideaways and star-spotting from your bed. Charlotte Sinclair on where to boldly go

Want to be alone?
Shakti Himalaya organises
trips to Ladakh



There can be no greater adventure than trekking and sleeping under the stars. Thankfully, such expeditions are no longer just the domain of hardcore backpackers. Balancing luxury and authenticity, innovative travel companies have come up with treks – or walks, if the word “trekking” puts you off – that introduce explorers to unknown parts of familiar countries and the glamour of comfortable camping. And for those who like their pleasures at a more sedate pace,

there are plenty of chic hotels offering alfresco suites – bedrooms open to the sky, where you can spend a night tucked up beneath a blanket of stars.

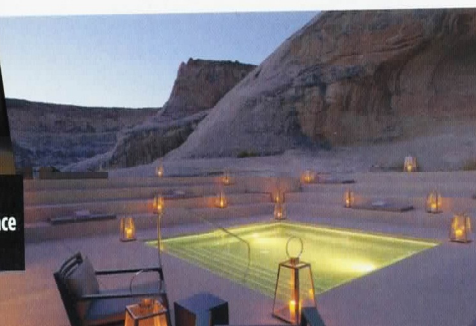
If luxury, for you, means isolation, then check out Shakti Himalaya (Shaktihimalaya.com). Shakti's trips across the dramatic, desert plains of Ladakh feature relaxed walks between temples and villages, far from the madding crowd. Guests sleep in renovated tea houses along the way, or in tents set in a green oasis by the Shyok River – reached by a day on the rapids.

Scott Dunn (Scottdunn.com) flies guests to the Dhorpatan Wilderness Trail, a former royal hunting ground in Nepal's hidden interior. Walk in the foothills of the Himalayas, along the banks of the Ganges and up through rhododendron forests for incredible views of the Annapurna Sanctuary. Night is spent under a sky of unfathomable depth, in tents complete with fresh linen and private showers. Those of a daring nature can paraglide off the ridge at Sarankot, or take a trip into the secretive kingdom of Mustang. A helicopter ride back to trek base Pokhara will be enough thrill for most.

If you seek more earthly pleasures, ground yourself at Amangiri in Utah (Amanresorts.com), a haven of stone, glass, water and sky, set among 600 acres of sandstone rocks and mountains. Beds can be set out under the stars, where the only sound is the wind, crickets and the occasional bark of coyotes. If sleeping quite so alfresco makes you nervous, book a suite with a sky terrace – a swimming pool set in an enclosed area open to the sky – so you can float away contemplating the mysteries of the universe.



Above and right, Amangiri resort in Utah – the perfect place for a spot of stargazing





Arkaba (Arkabastation.com) is a sheep station in Australia's Southern Highlands, in the shadow of the Flinders Ranges. Take a walking safari into the surrounding outback – populated by red and grey kangaroos, emus and yellow-footed rock wallabies – and sleep under the Southern Cross in a “swag camp”, a deluxe version of the traditional bushman's bedding.

Molori (Molori.co.za) in the Madikwe Game Reserve is home to the largest private telescope in the southern hemisphere. The design-oriented lodge has its own observatory and even a resident stargazer. Recline on a “star bag”, with a hot water bottle and cashmere blanket, and gaze at the Orion Nebula. Safari Drive (Safaridrive.com) offers a novel idea: drive yourself through Africa's animal hotspots in a 4x4 land cruiser with comfortable, pop-up, rooftop tents. Wend your way through Namibia, mixing camping with a stay at Sossusvlei Desert Lodge, where an astronomer will instruct you on the constellations. Combine trekking with star-spotting in Kenya at Loisaba Wilderness Lodge (Loisaba.com), where you can hike between the lodge's two “star beds” at Koboko and Koiya on the Ewaso Nyiro river. The beds are built on raised platforms which are wheeled out nightly. The air is crisp and clear, and the night full of the noise of animals.

Feynan Ecolodge (Feynan.com) is sited north of Petra, in the Jordanian desert. Intrepid guests can reach the lodge by hiking Indiana Jones-style (not really, hire a guide) through the canyon of Wadi Ghwayr. Feynan is in a nature reserve, and the building pays its dues to its location with some serious eco-credentials. Carved from mud, the monastically simple – but comfortable – rooms are candlelit at night. Pick one with a balcony for stargazing.

There is more to Peru than Machu Picchu: get off the beaten path with

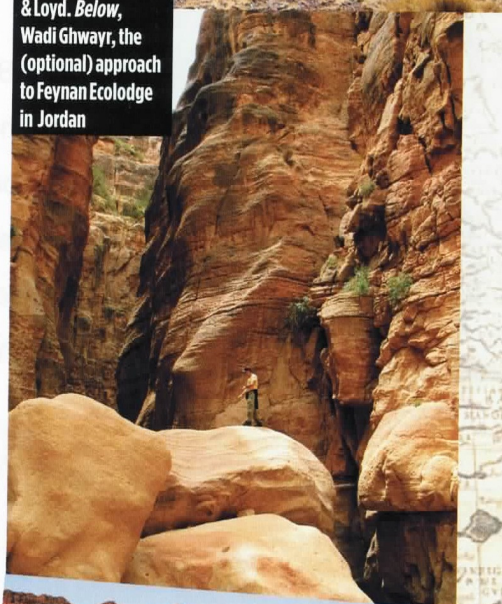
Cazenove & Loyd's (Cazloyd.com) treks into less discovered parts of the Peruvian Andes. A three-day expedition takes you through the Vilcabamba range, up to the Yanacocha lagoon. Tents are erected beside mountain lakes, or on the outskirts of the remote villages of the Quechua communities. Wearied limbs are eased by hot showers, hot food and, of course, a restorative glance heavenwards on the way to bed.

Book now to visit Turkey's Cappadocia region next October – the month of the Draconid meteor shower. The Draconids move more slowly than normal shooting stars, resembling the falling embers of a firework. Spend days hiking in the strange, mushroom-like Cappadocian mountains, and bunk down at Selcuklu Evi (Chicretreats.com), a restored traditional house.

Head into the pine forests of Lapland and to the unique Tree Hotel (Treehotel.se), consisting of six treehouses each created by a different architect. A bird's nest, a mirrored cube and a UFO are among the choices on offer. During the day, you can snowshoe into the wilderness, or, if that sounds too much like hard work, take a sledge ride on the frozen Lule river, pulled by huskies. At night, wrap up warm and climb on to the mirrored cube's terrace to watch the twisting colours of the Aurora Borealis. Stellar stuff. ■

VOGUE STARS

Above, trekking in Peru with Cazenove & Loyd. Below, Wadi Ghwayr, the (optional) approach to Feynan Ecolodge in Jordan



Above, a “swag camp” at Arkaba in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. Left, a “star bed” at the Loisaba Wilderness Lodge in Kenya



CASE STUDY

This 18-carat-gold cigarette case by Cartier, to be auctioned at Sotheby's in London on November 30, was a gift from Wallis Simpson to the Prince of Wales in 1935. Decorated with a map of Europe, enamel lines track their journeys together, while cities are represented by a cabochon gem or brilliant-cut diamond. Upon this evidence, they were a very well-travelled couple, hightailing from Istanbul to Cephalonia, Vienna to Montenegro. All, of course, in princely style. Visit Sothebys.com for more information.

