

# Going somewhere special this year?

Revealed: the hottest  
holiday destinations  
on earth (and beyond)

## Giorgio Armani

Why I'm launching a  
global hotel empire

## Shoes vs bags

The accessory war rages

## Edward St Aubyn

I researched my new  
book naked in a Jacuzzi



7 JANUARY 2008

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## Future Travel

Never-Never-Land for grown-ups in which he can promote and live out his design concept – without ever having to let the humdrum imperfections of everyday life interfere.

Perhaps this is why “home” is such an important concept to the designer, because it is the place where “one is insulated from the world, protected from the outside. You must create your own world. Then,” he says, “you can live your most personal moments in a highly intimate environment which delights and enfolds you.”

Armani owns houses all over the world – from his favourite villa on the volcanic island of Pantelleria near Sicily, to Broni in Lombardy, St Tropez, St Moritz, Paris, New York and Antigua – as well as the new Armani yacht *Marmania*, which is due to set sail this summer. “I spend most of my holidays in one of my houses, but I appreciate that it is important, occasionally, to get away from your own setting and to appreciate the world outside.”

As mass brands embrace every corner of the globe – from clothes to interiors and tourism – does this pioneer of the branded lifestyle see luxury travel going the same way? “People love to travel more than ever,” he says, “but they also like to find a congenial environment when away from home. In the past, the only people who travelled were those with an innate love of travel, whereas today travel has become an indispensable means of familiarising oneself with the world around us, because television and other media have brought everything so much closer to us.” In other words, as the branded world closes in, via PC screens and cheap flights, people driven by newfound aspirations will increasingly be able to experience the same luxury touchpoints everywhere in the world, from Marrakech to Mumbai. Spending a night in an Armani suite could soon be as easy as picking up a Chanel lipstick at the airport.

But the future is a potentially thorny issue for this sole owner of one of the biggest fashion empires in the world. He has a fabulous pair of pecs, works a gruelling schedule, personally oversees the design of every pair of jeans, footstool and pair of boxer shorts that goes into production and has been famously quoted as saying, “My life is my work, my work is my life”. Surely he can’t go on forever?

“As someone of a certain age, this is always on my mind; I think that is quite normal,” says Armani contemplatively, and it must, indeed, be a strangely disembodied sensation to think about the immortal nature of the empire he has created, guaranteed to continue long after he is gone – let alone the possibility of a successor.

“I am always aware of previous examples of the past, remarkable names that have disappeared, and without the founder everything has changed. Fashion houses, in particular, are affected and this makes me ponder, very deeply, what will happen in the post-Armani era. On a business level it is obvious that I must concern myself with endeavouring to construct teams of people able to take over responsibility, and to whom I can entrust the task of managing Giorgio Armani throughout the world in the future. But on a personal level, I prefer not to think about it, as I would rather work day to day as if starting my life anew every 24 hours.”

This is the first time the Herculean fashion icon has revealed even a glimpse of the man beneath the slick exterior. He continues: “When three-quarters of your life have passed, every day you live is a gift to yourself; I don’t wish for anything more than to live the rest of my life each day as it comes.”

As I get up to leave, Armani springs to his feet, tells me I have “lovely eyes” and demands that we have a photograph taken together. Briefly, the icon vanishes and there emerges the man from a small town in northern Italy who, in another life, might have been a doctor, lawyer, film director or writer. “But definitely something creative,” he exclaims with a final crinkly half-smile. ■

## Safari

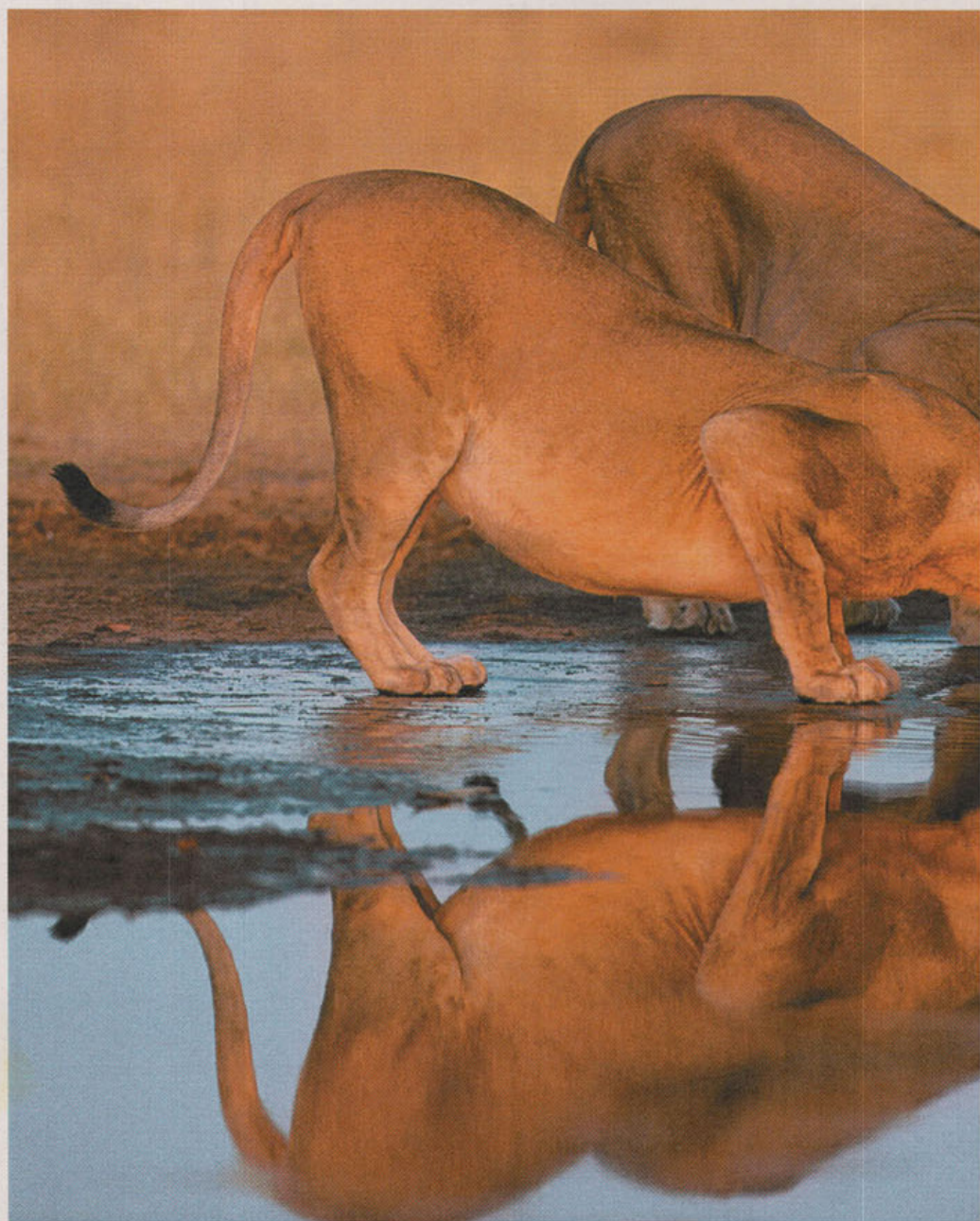
### Kanana camp, Botswana

Anyone who has been on safari in an African game park knows the problem: word goes out that a leopard has been spotted feasting on a springbok, and the next thing you know every Land Rover within 25 miles turns up.

Far worse, though, are the long-term pressures faced by the big national game parks: safari tourism is a relatively low priority for many governments, and,

in parks such as Tsavo National Park in Kenya, the beasts that have made sub-Saharan safaris famous are being driven out by increasing cultivation. So, to ensure a better chance of catching sight of the “big five” (lion, rhino, elephant, giraffe and buffalo) in peace and quiet, the safari tourist will have to resort to private reserves.

If that sounds a little depressing, according to Will Jones, founder and director of Journeys by Design, a high-end niche tour operator in the region, the concept is less exclusive than it seems. “The future survival of wildlife in Africa lies in land owned privately or by a community, who then lease the land to private companies,” he explains. “The Singita Serengeti in Tanzania, for instance, covers more than 350,000 acres, equivalent to the Masai Mara National Park. It’s about incentives, encouraging the community that owns the land to believe that there is financial security in maintaining their local, indigenous wildlife.”





The Shinde and Kanana parcels of land, bordering the Moremi Game Reserve in the Okavango Delta, are just such arrangements. Journeys by Design offers an itinerary that includes Shinde and its thriving pride of lions, and the astonishing small and large game attracted by the waters of Kanana (which translates as "paradise"). The camp at Kanana is typical of those that Jones works with, in that it is small (16 guests in eight tents) and more than comfortable: raised on stilts overlooking the flood plains, the camp receives daily fresh fruit and bread. You'll pay dearly for this experience, but do so in the knowledge that your money is, in part, safeguarding the extraordinary environment around you. **Mike Higgins**

*A two-week safari, including four nights at Kanana camp, costs from £4,225 per person (excluding international flights), [www.journeysbydesign.co.uk](http://www.journeysbydesign.co.uk)*



## Eco North Yorkshire

Natural Retreats is proof that green doesn't have to mean grunge. Its first development opened early last year, a collection of eight lodges set in 50 scenic, privately owned, acres of North Yorkshire countryside. Built from sustainable timber and glass, with insulation made from recycled paper, living-plant roofs and solar and green energy, the lodges also come with sleek open-plan kitchen and dining areas, solid oak flooring, cedar decking, flat-screen TVs, CD and DVD players and rain showers.

Between now and July, the company is adding nine new, improved, buildings to the North Yorkshire site and upgrading its existing properties with even more ecological features. When that is complete, work will then start on two new sites, one in Snowdonia and one in the Lake District; and over the next few years, Natural Retreats hopes to roll out its vision across Britain's 14 national parks. **Rhiannon Batten**

*Two-night breaks from £325 per lodge (sleeping six), 0161 242 2970, [www.naturalretreats.co.uk](http://www.naturalretreats.co.uk). Rhiannon Batten is the author of 'Higher Ground: How to Travel Responsibly Without Roughing It' (£12.99, Virgin Books)*



## City Tbilisi, Georgia

Gazing down from a hill-top terrace restaurant at the glorious jumble of ramshackle houses clinging to the rock beneath Tbilisi's ancient fortress, it is easy to see why so many have become enchanted by Georgia's capital. Since 2003's Rose Revolution, the city has undergone a sustained revival from post-Soviet depression, with widespread renovation of historic squares and an upsurge in new bars, cafés and hotels. But its heart is still the picturesquely crumbling old town, with narrow lanes dominated by overhanging balconies and communal courtyards.

Tbilisi is also a good base for hiking or skiing into the Caucasus mountains, or trips to the vineyard regions or the subtropical Black Sea coast. But the social culture of the city – and its nightlife – revolves around the table. Georgians are passionate about wine and singing, and one of Tbilisi's most magical experiences is hearing diners in different parts of a restaurant spontaneously harmonising their way through a traditional song. **Matthew Collin**

*For more information contact Regent Holidays, 0845 277 3317, [www.regent-holidays.co.uk](http://www.regent-holidays.co.uk)*

## Spas Seychelles, Malaysia, Oman and Thailand

We're starting to tire of the Identikit spa experience. What is the difference between a hot-stone therapy in Hua Hin or Hampshire? No, the future of the spa is in going native.

The pinch-yourself location of the Seychelles' private Frigate Island, teeming with native flora, makes the Rock Spa the ideal place to plunder nature's remedies. All the treatments are carried out using face and body products made with locally grown coconut, aloe vera, crushed cashew nuts and cinnamon. The just-opened Majestic Malacca spa village in Malaysia draws on the healing remedies of local Peranakan culture, while Middle Eastern hammams will be de rigueur at the Six Senses Hideaway Ziggy Bay in Oman (below) when it opens in April. The Erawan, on the Thai island of Naka Yai, meanwhile, will be able to lay claim to its own on-site Thai massage school when it opens in March. **Aoife O'Riordan** →

*For more information go to [www.frigate.com](http://www.frigate.com), [www.majesticmalacca.com](http://www.majesticmalacca.com), [www.sixsenses.com](http://www.sixsenses.com)*



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