

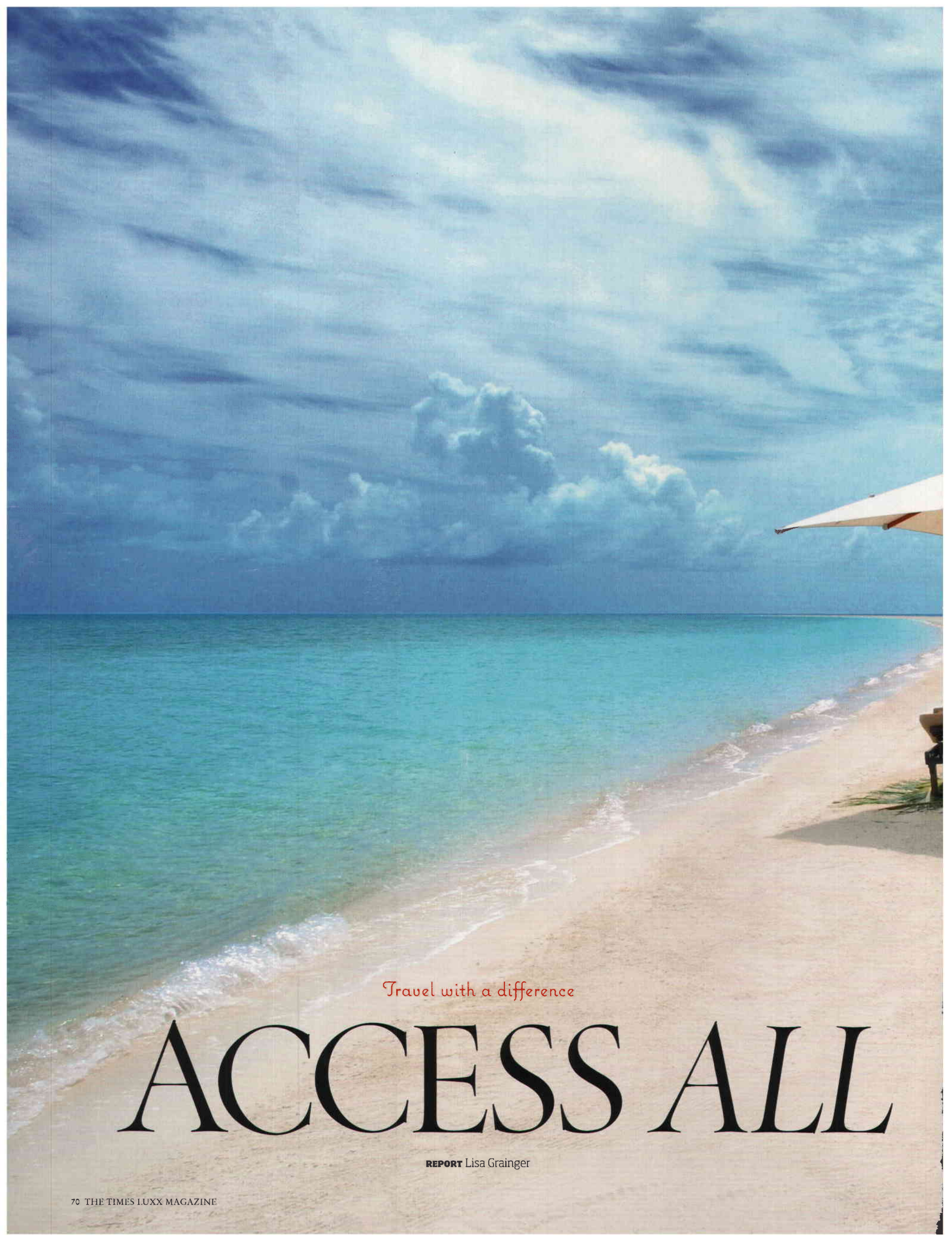
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THE BEST OF EVERYTHING 15.11.08



THE ART OF GIVING
This time it's personal...

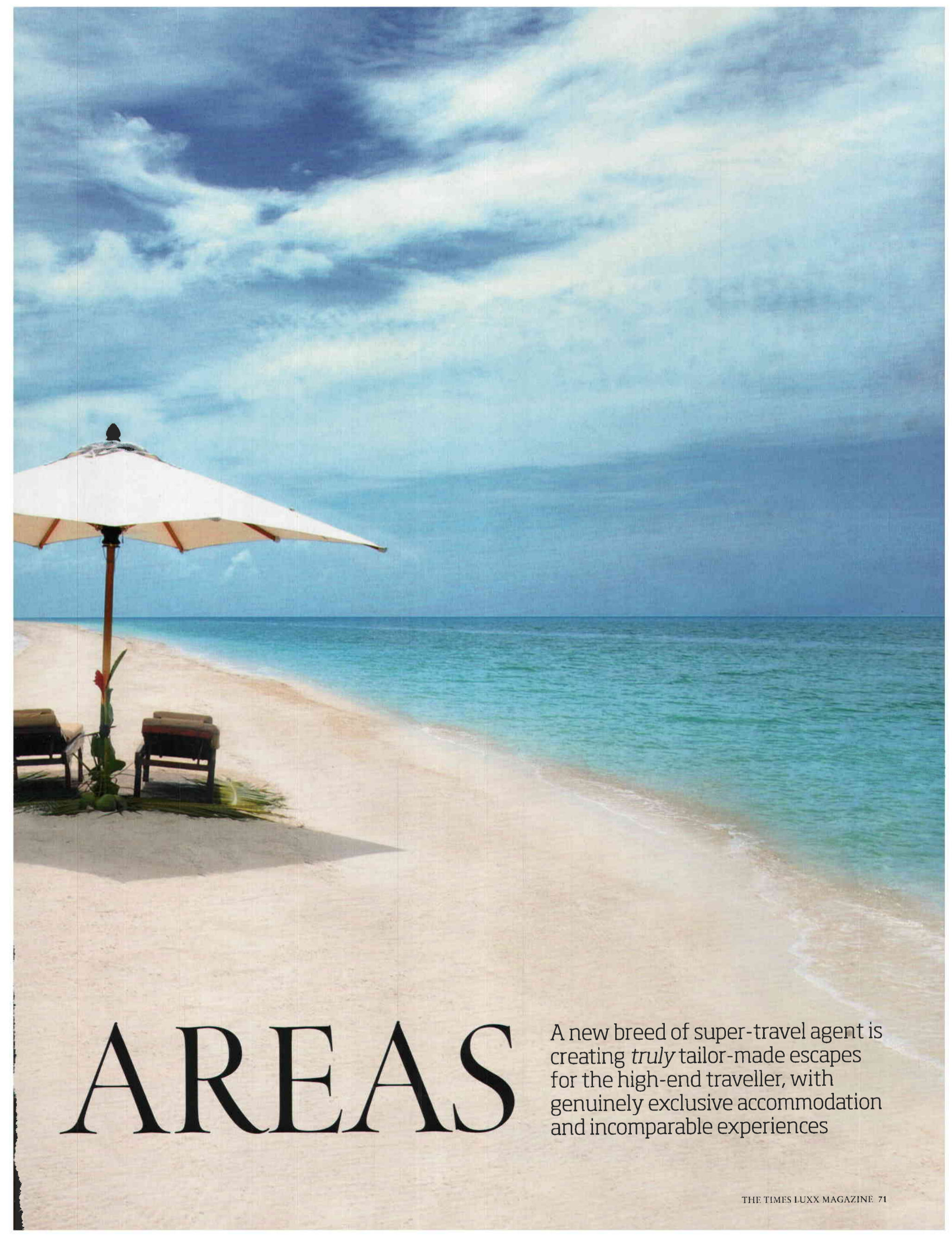
DREAM PRESENTS
BAUBLES TO TREASURE
BESPOKE SOLUTIONS



Travel with a difference

ACCESS ALL

REPORT Lisa Grainger



AREAS

A new breed of super-travel agent is creating *truly* tailor-made escapes for the high-end traveller, with genuinely exclusive accommodation and incomparable experiences

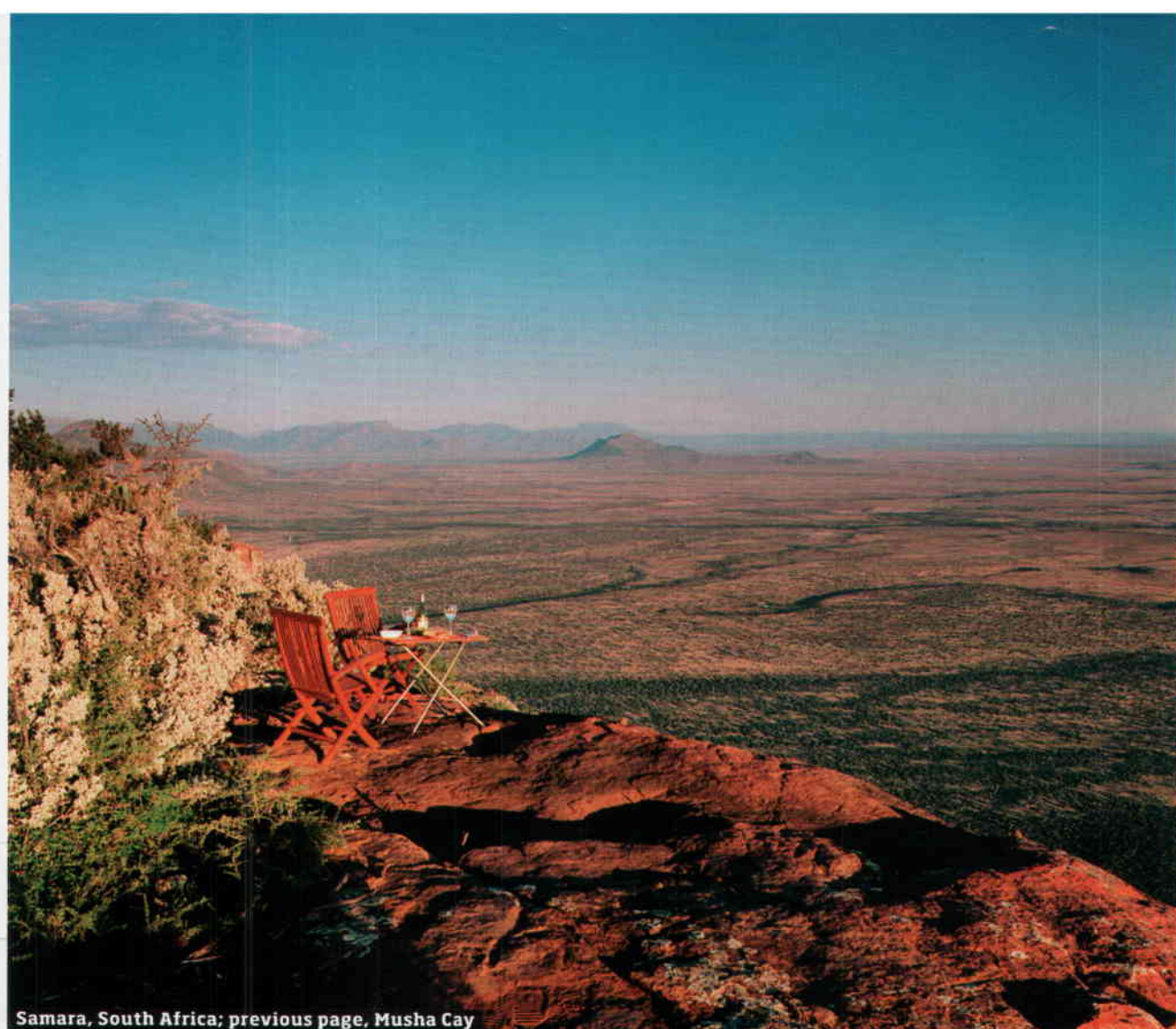
When a hotel chain employs “experience managers”, when travel directors are employed for their society connections, and when upmarket agents won’t reveal details about their top secret hideaways, because “they are just that, secret, for our private clients and friends only”, you know you’re in a different travel league: the league of the super-traveller.

Once, holidays were seen as an annual get-away-from-it-all treat. In the world of the super-traveller, they’ve become something else. They’re taken a few times a year (a family beach break followed by a safari, ski week and city break). They’re seen as essential breaks, space to decompress from the stresses of the urban hothouse. They’re networking opportunities. And they’re often time for a bit of one-upmanship – as Black Tomato co-founder Tom Marchant puts it, “a time to have experiences that will make people’s jaws drop at drinks parties”.

In spite of the global downturn, there does still seem to be a reasonably stable number of “ultra-high net worth individuals” for whom blowing £250,000 annually on holidays – or buying planes and boats on which to enjoy them – is still not a dream, but a reality.

In a world where names on the Forbes 400 Rich List are still billionaires, rather than millionaires, the market for private jets has never been healthier, with companies such as Gulfstream achieving 17 per cent more orders for business jets in the first quarter of 2008. And private membership organisations such as Earth and Based On A True Story – both of which handpick their 150 or so clients, and tailor-make every experience those members have on a trip – say they are having to turn away clients, no matter how rich, to keep their membership as they intended: small and exclusive.

What sets the members of these super-travel clubs apart, apparently, is their desire for rarity and enjoyment, rather than ostentation. Although a few clients such as the Saudi Royal family – whose travel arrangements are made by Exosphere in London – still require “the presidential suites in the best hotels to make them feel they are at the very top”, according



Samara, South Africa; previous page, Musha Cay

to director Sophie Leyton, most wealthy travellers want something very different.

They look for “privacy and escapism, things that make you feel fantastic”, says Kuoni’s 2008 World Class Report. They ask for “space – whether that’s in their jets or their suites”, says Robin Fawcett, whose company Jeffersons only organises private-jet holidays. And more than anything, writes Robert Frank, author of *Richistan: A Journey Through the American Wealth Boom and the Lives of the New Rich*, they want “to set themselves apart from the merely affluent. You want things no one else can afford or experience. The challenge is always to stay ahead.”

While time is often travellers’ most precious commodity – so getting them to destinations quickly and comfortably is important – it’s often the little things that matter more, says Penny Henson of Quintessentially, which for membership fees from £5,000 to £24,000 will organise details

right down to the cigar humidor and personal driver. The exact details depend on the clients.

The 100 or so people who belong to Bellini Travel, says managing director Emily FitzRoy, probably place the highest value on meeting interesting, connected people and seeing sights privately, rather than with the crowds. Which is why her bespoke trips to Italy might take in a private dinner with a Principessa in her canal-side palace, an after-hours tour with a priest through private areas of the Vatican, or a lunch on board the last remaining sail-powered fishing boat in Venice.

“Rarity is the ultimate goal,” says Tom Marchant of Black Tomato, who has arranged helicopter camping trips to Australia’s isolated Haggerstone Island, as well as parties on the remote Angra dos Reis islands in Brazil. “For our clients it is something more bespoke than you can imagine, that has almost never been done before.”

Like what? “One recent client from Canada wanted to do his own seven wonders of the world in two weeks. So we took him scuba diving between tectonic plates in Iceland; shark diving with some of South Africa’s top marine biologists; jetted him privately to India to get him into the Taj Mahal after hours; flew him to Beijing and into the Emperor’s quarters (which is very difficult to arrange); and then took him to Hiroshima, where we had arranged a surprise meeting with an author of a book he had raved about.”

The super-agents aim to provide the ideal experience without the

client noticing the process. Fox, for instance, arranged for a treehouse to be built in a Kenyan reserve, for exclusive wildlife-watching, and on another trip to Jordan organised out-of-hours access to Petra, where the client enjoyed dinner in the light of 1,000 candles.

Exosphere’s Sophie Denton sorted breakfast at an Egyptian temple at dawn, for a romantic proposal. Bellini’s Emily FitzRoy flew in a La Scala soprano to sing at a dinner in an Italian palace. Paddy Singh of Hindoostan Tours escorted guests to a maharajah’s wedding. Sebastian Lee from Latitude International, which arranges bespoke trips within the UK, set up a dinner with the Crown Jewellers in the Tower of London, and a 50th birthday golf trip to Scotland – culminating in a round at St Andrews with his favourite golfer, who’d won the Open there.

The rarity factor applies to accommodation too. Even Nat Rothschild’s villa in Corfu can be rented if you know the right people – such as Cedric Reversade, who lets a collection of European homes to private clients, including the most beautiful house ever built on Lake Como. “It is like a fairytale palace, and very rarely let out,” he says.

Price, most exclusive operators say, isn’t the issue. “Sure, clients want value,” says Marchant. “But the sky’s the limit if they trust you.”

Besides, says Niel Fox, founder of Based On A True Story, who says he can do “almost anything, almost anywhere”, when his 20 or so

ONE TRAVEL SUPER-AGENT ARRANGED OUT-OF-HOURS ACCESS TO PETRA, WITH A DINNER BY THE LIGHT OF 1,000 CANDLES



A private visit to the Sistine Chapel



Elephant safari in Botswana



Maltese Falcon

£200,000-a-year clients entrust their holidays to him, they also entrust their lives. "Most of our clients enjoy going to very different, sometimes far-flung places, so everything has to be watertight in terms of arrangements, staff, expeditions, bureaucracy, security," he says. Which is why often he will do a full reconnaissance trip himself beforehand, ensuring every detail is covered.

"Wealthy people aren't naive. They have experienced a lot, so what you deliver has to live up to expectations. They don't want to pay €10,000 [£8,000] for a palatial suite, for instance, and then find they are going to be charged an extra €10 [£8] for a bottle of water. That's a rip-off. But they will pay for truly amazing things – like to see frescos in a private palace, because, unless you know the owners, no one else can do that. Their aim often is to get under the skin of a place. And that's really what we're there to help them do."

Based On A True Story: 020-7100 6991, www.basedonatruestory.co.uk. *Bellini Travel:* 020-7602 7602, www.bellinitravel.com. *Black Tomato:* 020-7610 9008, www.blacktomato.co.uk. *Earth:* www.earthlondon.com. *Exosphere:* www.exosphere.com. *Latitude International:* 020-7373 1999, www.latitude-international.com. *Jeffersons:* 020-8746 2496, www.jeffersons.com. *Quintessentially:* 0870 8508585, www.quintessentially.com. *Hindoostan Tours:* 01722 327178, www.hindoostantours.com. *Cedric Reversade:* www.cedricreversade.com.

SUPER-TRAVELLER HOTSPOTS

The sailing boat Maltese Falcon

Silicon Valley billionaire Tom Perkins spent £80 million creating the most technically advanced superyacht on earth. As well as sails that "disappear" into the masts, the Falcon has two 32ft tenders, so guests can whiz into marinas for dinner, four Laser sailing dinghies, should a mini-regatta appeal, and toys including windsurfers and jet skis. £300,000 per week, Camper & Nicholsons (www.cnconnect.com).

The alternative Parsifal III, with sleek monochrome Rémi Tessier interiors, from £168,000 a week. From Camper & Nicholsons, as before.

Almost affordable Tusitiri, a 20m dhow, sleeping ten, moored in Lamu, Kenya, £8,320 for three nights, from Scott Dunn (www.scottdunn.com).

The island North Island, Seychelles

The eco-resort in the Seychelles, which has hosted Brad Pitt and Pierce Brosnan, has 11 villas overlooking white beaches and turquoise clear sea. It is set in luscious forests spreading over boulder-strewn hills, with bicycles and electric golf carts to get around. The resort offers a spa, diving equipment, Hobie catamarans, fly-fishing rods and kayaks, as well as game rangers on hand to show off batches of hatching turtles. From £11,000 per person per week, including flights (www.north-island.com).

The alternative Musha Cay, owned by magician David Copperfield,

sleeping 24 on 11 islands, from £23,000 for 12 to £28,700 for 24 (www.mushacay.com).

Almost affordable Quilálea, a tiny remote island off north Mozambique, sleeping 18, from £6,600 a day (www.quilalea.com).

The remote resort Lizard Island, Australia

This 1,000-acre, 40-room island off the north coast of Queensland in Australia has everything: 24 beaches with fabulous snorkelling just offshore, various boats to mess about in, a big party-house for get-togethers, hills to climb, tennis courts to play on, private pools to swim in and a spa to be pummelled in. It also has its own airstrip, for easy access; no mobile-phone coverage for guaranteed seclusion; and the Great Barrier Reef just a 50-minute boat ride away. From £80,000 for two nights (www.lizardisland.com.au).

The alternative Richard Branson's Necker Island. From £31,500 a night for up to 28 guests (www.neckerisland.com).

Almost affordable Wilson Island, Australia. From £3,947 for six people for two nights (www.wilsonisland.com).

The bush house Ol Donyo Laro, Kenya

Jan Bonde Nielsen, the Danish tycoon who owned Wembley in the Eighties, rents out this private retreat to carefully vetted groups of up to 16, to raise funds for conservation. For £155,000 a week, guests can explore his 65,000 acres of Africa, either in

his private helicopter, his fleet of 4x4s or his two Cessna aircraft. Day trips can be organised: a flight to Mount Kenya, horseriding in the Mara, landing at Lake Natron at cocktail hour to admire flamingos (www.journeysbydesign.co.uk).

The alternative Royal Malewane, the OTT bush house beloved of Elton John, just outside South Africa's Kruger National Park, sleeping 20, from £7,850 per night (www.royalmalewane.com).

Almost affordable Samara Manor House, in South Africa, £1,450 for eight per night (www.cazloyd.com).

The Italian villa Villa Taglioni, Lake Como

A private villa owned by the same family as the Villa d'Este boutique hotel, on the opposite side of the lake. The marbled, fresco-filled interiors remain almost as they were in the 19th century, when ballerina Marie Taglioni entertained guests such as Liszt and Rossini. Luxuries added post-Taglioni include seven acres of landscaped garden, a 200sq m pool and a jetty so guests can arrive by seaplane. From £29,000 a week, sleeping 18, Bellini Travel (www.bellinitravel.co.uk).

The alternative Casellaccia, in Tuscany, owned by interior designer Iliana Miani, from £10,000 a week, sleeping up to 19. From Bellini Travel, as before.

Almost affordable Casa Fontana, on the island of Ponza in Italy, owned by one of Italy's leading style magazine editors, sleeping eight, from £2,155 (www.cvtravel.co.uk). **✉**