



What's STOPPING YOU...

... ticking off the travel on your bucket list? Money, time and a global pandemic, you cry! But, as Lucy Kehoe discovers, now's the time to start making plans

Have you been dreaming about lounging on a white-sand Caribbean beach, mojito in hand? Or fantasising of a trip through pristine Arctic snowscapes in a husky-pulled sledge? Far-flung escapes might seem a bit remote right now, but being grounded means there's time to consider that trip you've always wanted to do, and turn it into a reality. After a travel hiatus, what better way to kick-start your midlife reboot than by heading to your

wish-list destination? Sure, these trips come with hefty price tags, but once-in-a-lifetime means exactly that.

As you plot your course, keep in mind that conscious travel is all about taking things slow and soaking in every moment – a perfect combination for a bucket-list trip. From wandering beneath the unsung ancient wonders of Egypt, to freewheeling through Havana on vintage wheels, it's time to start counting the pennies and planning your adventure. Now, where did we last leave our passports?

Sail down the Nile
in a dahabiya

EXPLORE EGYPT'S ANCIENT WONDERS

Swerve Cairo's frenetic crowds and surrounding jam-packed historical sites by boarding a traditional boat to sail the Nile's meandering curves in search of lesser-known ancient wonders.

Dahabiya – small, sail-powered boats – offer a slower-pace of travel along the celebrated waterway, where days are filled with dips in the shallows, stops at rural riverbank villages and quiet moments absorbing the pastoral scenes of riverbank life flowing by. Able to moor up in places larger vessels can't, these chic-cabined sail

boats can access less-frequented temple sites, such as the columned Horemheb Temple, allowing for leisurely exploration of Egypt's sand-dusted history.

WHEN TO DO IT Avoid the scorching heat of north African summers and touch down in Cairo between October and April, when temperatures cool, at lowest, to a balmy 21C.

HOW TO DO IT Nour El Nil's five-day river cruises on various-sized dahabiya cost from £1,000pp, including meals. nourelnil.com

The Horemheb
Temple in Egypt



The majestic Royal
Scotsman in action

HIGHLANDS BY TRAIN

Winding its way from Edinburgh up through the Kingdom of Fife and onwards into the Highlands, travelling on the sleek Royal Scotsman offers all the nostalgia of an Orient Express

adventure, pairing continental opulence with Scotland's stunning vistas. This is travel at its most romantic – the moors, mountains and lochs unspooling out of the window. Evening hours are whiled away with traditional entertainment (think inclusive whisky nightcaps), while

meals make the most of the country's bountiful larder. Off-train excursions include a tasting trip to Strathisla Distillery and a visit to the rolling Rothiemurchus Estate, while dinners are a formal affair and celebrate Scotland's terrific natural resources.

WHEN TO DO IT There's one word to describe summer in the Highlands: midges. Avoid uncomfortable bites by planning your rail adventure between September and May. Temperatures are warmer in spring – with an average of up to 15C – but autumn offers breathtaking auburn foliage over the hills.

HOW TO DO IT Belmond's 'Taste of the Highlands' on the Royal Scotsman costs from £3,350pp for a three-day journey, including all meals, drinks and activities. belmond.com



Mykonos is full of charm

FEAST IN GREECE

Touring the gourmet delights of Greece tops many holiday bucket lists, but with more than 227 populated islands, an archipelago-hopping tour can mean you miss the hidden pleasures of this country's capacious food. Instead, pick just one destination and jump into the deep end; beneath the surface charms of whitewashed Mykonos is a sizzling local cuisine. Staying in a chic guest house at the centre of the island, you'll visit traditional farm restaurants, take cooking classes with the island matriarchs and lunch in a Cycladic family home on kopanisti (spicy, soft cheese) and louza cured pork. Evenings involve chargrilled calamari at beachside tavernas, with local Assyrtiko wine.

WHEN TO DO IT Summer holidays see crowds descend in the Aegean, so pick a shoulder season to avoid the swells, but still catch some sunshine. April to early June or late September moving into October will promise warm weather without the crowds.

HOW TO DO IT Aegean Flavours' '8 Days in Mykonos' includes accommodation, meals and activities for £1,452pp, based on double room occupancy. aegeanflavours.com

SLEEP BENEATH THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Watching the mystical aurora borealis – the Northern Lights, our planet's breathtaking celestial night show – is one of life's great pleasures. But there's no guarantee of catching the elusive phenomenon on an Arctic circle trip. Increase your chances with expert help at the Wilderness Hotel Inari in Finnish Lapland, where regular 'aurora alerts' will have you slipping on snowshoes and adventuring across pristine expanses to catch the display, helped by indigenous guides. There's even an option to stay beneath a glass-roofed cabin for maximised chances to spot the illuminations. Daytimes are taken up with dog-sledding through taiga forests and cross-country skiing in the snow, before heading to the lakeside sauna to soothe sore muscles.

WHEN TO DO IT Aurora viewing season starts in mid-August and ends by April, but the illuminations are most active at the edges of the season.

Wilderness Hotel's aurora cabins



HOW TO DO IT The Aurora Zone's 'Wilderness Hotel Inari – Auroras by the Frozen Lake' itinerary costs from £1,945pp and includes flights, accommodation, meals, activities and cold-weather clothing. theaurorazone.com

SAFARI IN STYLE

Eschewing the quick turnarounds favoured by prohibitively priced camps, this alternative safari will have you boarding a luxurious locomotive in South Africa on a 12-day adventure, travelling through the incredible landscapes of Botswana and Zimbabwe at a leisurely pace. Ensnared in a cherry-wood cabin, champagne in hand, this is a chance to experience Africa's diverse topography and picture-book wildlife at a slower pace. Four days in – with inclusive game drive excursions en route – you'll catch sight of the magnificent Victoria Falls. Then, it's straight on to the floating hotel, Zambezi Queen, to navigate the Chobe River's gentle curves, dodging hippos and elephants along the way.

WHEN TO DO IT The dry season stretches from May to October and provides the best wildlife viewing as animals congregate near water sources, but the burning sun can be draining. For few crowds, but warm, dry weather, arrive in April or May.

HOW TO DO IT Ker & Downey Africa's 12-day 'Rovos Rail and River Slow Travel Safari' departs on 2 October and costs from £4,599pp, not including flights. ker-downeyafrica.com



**Zambezi Queen
on the Chobe**

BE COOL IN CILINGING CUBA

It's all change in Cuba. This nostalgic Caribbean island is shedding its retro patina, so its allures are now in limited supply. Make the most of the famous fading grandeur with a ride in a vintage vehicle through the crumbling splendour of Havana. A chauffeur-driven drive along the Atlantic waterfront offers snapshot views of the majestic Capitol Building, glimpses into opulent plazas and a sense of the city's evocative street life. For island exploration, you'll want modern wheels – pick up a hire car and head to unspoilt countryside, winding round bulbous rock formations and verdant valleys towards French-influenced Cienfuegos and the sunshine city of Trinidad, where white-sand beaches await.

WHEN TO DO IT For warm, sunny sightseeing days, visit in spring – any later than April and you'll contend with summer storms and rising humidity.

HOW TO DO IT Beyond the Ordinary Travel's seven-night customisable itinerary takes you across western Cuba

from Havana to Santa Clara, including activities and car hire, from £1,349. It can be self-guided or by private transfer. beyondtheordinary.co.uk

EARN YOUR STRIPES IN INDIA

Experience a taste of independent travel in the sun-baked state of Rajasthan in northern India. Think marble forts, ochre-toned pastures and a chance to track down the elusive Bengal tiger. A guided group holiday with like-minded travellers offers the excitement of solo adventure without the stress of planning it yourself. You'll stroll the frenetic streets of Delhi, visit rural Rajasthan villages and drive through the rustling grasses of Ranthambore National Park, eyes peeled to spot a languorous twitch

**COVID
CAUTION**

± Please be aware that travellers from the UK may face restrictions on departure, arrival, or on return. All information is correct at the time of going to print, but the situation is ever-changing, so travellers are advised to bear this in mind before booking, and to check the latest FCDO travel advice before any departure at gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

of a striped tail. Alongside an obligatory Taj Mahal trip, there's visits to natural wonders – like the evocative Thar Desert – plus that all-important free time to explore on your own.

WHEN TO DO IT Visit between October and March to avoid the intense summer sun and the monsoon season's downpours. Temperatures in winter reach 27C – perfect for exploration.

HOW TO DO IT Intrepid Travel's 'Classic Rajasthan' itinerary includes ground transport, accommodation, selected meals and activities, from £1,065pp. intrepidtravel.com

PHOTOS: ALAMY, AURORA TRAVEL, DYLAN CHANDLER, GETTY, INTREPID TRAVEL, KER & DOWNNEY AFRICA GROUP, DAVID NORTON



**The main street
in Havana**

**The Taj Mahal has
stunning detail**

