

# Top 10

## HOTSPOTS FOR 2018

Writer Vicki Williams

This year the focus is on alternate travel destinations, with seasoned travellers wanting to explore lesser-known destinations or favourites that are back in vogue



### 1

#### *Fiji*

Long overshadowed by the Maldives as a favoured honeymoon hotspot, this tropical archipelago of more than 300 white-sand islands is back, and not just for loved-up couples, with families finding appeal in its paradise setting and warm hospitality. While more direct flights, including those from Singapore and Hong Kong, have added to its draws, there are many other enticing factors, including a host of award-winning luxury resorts on private islands, over the water and in secretive locations. There are also pristine waters and island hopping ideal for exploring be it sailing, diving, snorkelling, swimming, paddle boarding, kayaking or game fishing. A destination where you can be active or mindfully do nothing at all but relax.



### 2

#### *Croatia*

Medieval history meets beach bliss in the Republic of Croatia. A destination to get to this year before it becomes too popular (50 new hotels were estimated to open last year). Interestingly, due to its number of ecoregions it is one of the most biodiverse countries in Europe. Among the most picturesque cities is Dubrovnik with its charming old town, limestone streets, and Baroque architecture set against the Adriatic Sea. Or take a cruise on the placid lakes of Plitvice Lakes National Park, a forested park featuring 16 gorgeous lakes that are connected by a series of waterfalls. And don't forget to try the local wine – there are more than 300 geographically defined wine-producing areas in Croatia.



### 3

#### *Mongolia*

New airport, new roads, new branded hotel openings, and a new focus on tourism, all signs point to Mongolia as one of the next undiscovered hotspots. Off-the-beaten-path adventures, nomadic culture, deserts, crystal-clear lakes, rivers and waterfalls, majestic and vast landscapes, and blue skies are all to be experienced here. Mongolia is also known as the 'Land of Blue Sky' with over 250 days of sunshine per year on average. Horse riding is also an option; the animals having long played a part in daily life and festivals, in addition to camel riding in the desert. Or stay in a traditional ger (Mongolian tent). The capital Ulaanbaatar is a good for cashmere shopping and unique items made by local artisans.

4

Colombia

Various countries in South America have been spotlighted in the past few years and now it is time for Colombia. Considered both safe for travel and this year's must-visit, the country is known for its natural beauty and diverse scenery and climate zones. There are also captivating villages, UNESCO Heritage Sites, as well as riding or hiking in the cloud forest of Cocora Valley. It's also a coffee lover's dream, with not only an opportunity to drink the locally grown variety but to visit a coffee estate and learn more. Foodies will delight in the street food scene, with private tasting tours and cooking classes available. It is also known for its biodiversity, ranking first in bird species and up to 20 per cent of global plant species.



5

Jordan

While the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan may be small compared to its neighbours, this is part of its appeal. With the right planning it is possible to experience numerous famous places in just a few days. This includes the historical architecturally significant city of Petra – the Kingdom's most iconic attraction, with its rock cut architecture, best seen at dawn and dusk. Go camel riding across the national park, Wadi Rum (Valley of the Moon), used in many movies, especially sci-fi films including *Prometheus* and *The Martian*. Otherwise the Red Sea resort city of Aqaba that has almost a mirage-like quality, or take a therapeutic float in the Dead Sea, said to be good for the skin. The country is also famous for its hospitality and tea drinking, that often go hand-in-hand.

6

Ethiopia

For the truly adventurous, it has to be Ethiopia, with tourism in the very early stages, offering a truly road-less-travelled holiday. Those who have experienced this diverse African nation talk of stunning architecture, warm welcomes, fascinating culture, breathtaking scenery and fabulous wildlife. Highlights include World Heritage-listed Harar, with 368 alleyways in one square kilometre filled with mosques and markets. Visit mysterious and ancient Aksum, the supposed home of the Queen of Sheba, resting place of the Ark of the Covenant, untold treasures and undiscovered tombs.





8

*Greenland*

Another option for lovers of natural scenery is Greenland. Known for its stunning light, this largest island in the world is located between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans. For a unique experience go on a husky sled expedition where you may see polar bears, arctic foxes and reindeer, or flight seeing for a bird's-eye view. There's also kayaking, fishing or mountain biking. Take in stillness as you watch slow-moving icy waterways, or be awed by towering glaciers, icebergs and perhaps even a whale, a perfect detox for the city-stressed visitor.

9

*Ausangate*

The only one on the list that is not a country, rather a place in Peru. This jaw-dropping, incredibly beautiful, sacred mountain was once a place for pilgrimage for the Incas. Today it is still a place of pilgrimage for Peruvians and provides one of the most unique and remote treks (four to seven days) in Peru, starting at an altitude of over 4,000 metres. It is often called the Rainbow Mountain due to the terrain, which provides continually changing intense colours. Along the way, experienced trekkers can expect to see glaciers, lakes and hot springs thought to have healing properties, and wildlife such as condors and llamas. There is also the option to do the trek on horseback.



10

*Madagascar*

Made even more famous by a certain animated film with the same name, the Republic of Madagascar is known for its wildlife, with over 90 per cent found nowhere else on the planet. Its diverse and appealing landscapes range from highlands with terraced fields to tropical rainforest and white sandy beaches on the shores of the Indian Ocean. Its capital Antananarivo is great for trying the local cuisine (influenced by Southeast Asia, Africa, India and France), markets, shopping, museums and historical culture.

When planning trips in destination that are not as tourism savvy, or for more challenging expeditions, your best bet is working with an expert tour operator/travel company. Two of the most highly recommended in Hong Kong for alternate travel destinations with a responsible luxury focus are Lightfoot Travel and Jacada Travel.

