



**The travel itch list 2024: A new year, OutThere**



We haven't been everywhere, but it's on our list! As it is a whole new year for travel, it's only natural for us Experientialist®s to ponder and plan where the next 12 months will take us (and the remarkable travel experiences that await us there). Luckily for us, we had a head start. At the end of last year, we were invited to attend ILTM Cannes, **the flagship travel show and global gathering of the who's who in luxury travel**. There, we encountered some extraordinary experiences (and the people behind them) that we are putting firmly on this year's OutThere travel itch list. And we're thrilled to share them with you. Perhaps they'll serve as inspiration for your own list of must-go places in 2024...

As we started putting together this travel itch list while visiting Cannes, it's only fair (and fabulous) to start there.

Right on the beachfront of the famed Croisette, there's a new beach club concept: **Vilebrequin La Plage**. If you did a double take on its name, don't worry, we did too. Yes, it's the same Vilebrequin as the upscale resort-wear brand. But this isn't a collaboration with one of Cannes' opulent seafront hotels; Vilebrequin is the latest fashion retailer with a vertical extension into luxury travel, having opened their first beach club on the Med and now with an opening planned in Miami later this year. The brand's CEO, Roland Herlory has bigger ambitions though, telling us that they have their sights set on creating an ocean-facing boutique hotel collection and are actively looking for their first property in the brand's home, on the South of France

Just up the coast in Nice, there's another ambitious project on the way, one we predict is going to be among the most hotly anticipated hotel openings this year. As such, it lurks right up at the top of our travel itch list. **Hotel du Couvent** is set in a preserved, former 17th-century convent and is undergoing a painstaking restoration that has already taken ten years. It shall be the apex of hotelier Valéry Grégo's over-two-decade career in hospitality. He's someone who has had the Midas touch when it comes to boutique hotels, and his story is particularly interesting to us, as someone who has pushed back hard against institutional prejudices and found great success. This 88-room property will throw out the rulebook on heritage hospitality. When it opens this summer, it'll boast a movement and dance studio, host a contemporary music festival, fund a countryside annexe that will be a fully working farm, have no televisions, debut a pay-what-you-want restaurant to the local community, create a bespoke soundtrack and scent, and will be staffed by a handpicked, diverse and inclusive team, dressed by Yang Li of Hermes-owned superbrand Shang Xia. And all that it's just the tip of the iceberg. We can't wait.

If you're lucky enough to be able to fly to both of these properties this year by private jet, then you might want to consider being part of **Flexjet**. It's one of the world's leading shared (also known as 'fractional') private aviation ownership programmes. It features guaranteed availability and access to a global fleet of premium, interior-designed aircraft, alongside a refined, hand-held, top-tier service with 24/7 priority scheduling. Add to that soft, personal touches – like partnerships with like-minded luxury brands (including many of our favourite hotel brands)... being part of Flexjet is as much of a lifestyle as it is being a shareholder – and an unrivalled dedication to the onboard experience through their incredible team, all fully employed and trained by the company. We had the pleasure of flying from London to Nice with them last year and were blown away.



From top: Resort wear makes moves into hospitality: Vilebrequin opens its first beach clubs and soon, hotels; hotelier Valéry Grégo is soon to open his 'last hotel project', Hotel du Couvent; Flexjet's fractional ownership programme gives more rewards than flights itself; the Space Perspective expects to send punters up on balloon journeys to the edge of space as early as 2025; Golden Rock Resort in Sint Eustatius is a 'new place on earth' even for us seasoned Experientialist®s; and Oberoi will launch a fleet of intimate small cruises from their private piers on the Nile in Egypt. (Photography courtesy of respective brands)

Other novel ways to 'fly' include a journey by balloon. But not just any balloon... a space balloon. This experience will begin taking bookings in 2024 in readiness for its first launches in 2025. **Space Perspective** will provide a new sensation for high-flyers – The Overview Effect – on a sustainable, balloon-driven, six-hour journey to the edge of space and back again from its base in Florida, with plans to do luxurious marine launches from floating basecamps out at sea. It is horizon-expanding on so many levels, but we understand that it would take a daredevil spirit to be among the first onboard. If like us, this doesn't phase you, then put it on your travel itch list immediately!

Back on our beautiful beach, we learnt of a place that we had never heard of before... Sint Eustatius, known locally and among the yachting set as Stalia, in the Dutch Caribbean, near St. Kitts and St. Barths. This tucked-away small island (population 3,000) boasts the serene and luxurious **Golden Rock Resort**, set in resplendent gardens at the foot of a volcano. The 100% energy-self-sufficient resort is owned by a man who grows and sells roses for a living, albeit the owner of one of the world's biggest companies that do so.

Elsewhere on the water – more specifically on the Nile in Egypt – **Oberoi** is launching several new, intimate, private-cruising vessels for small groups to traverse this historical, ancient land in style. The Indian ultra-luxury brand known for its grand palaces may already be famed for its Zahra and Philae cruisers, but these new vessels will have just a handful of cabins each, allowing private exploration and personalised, non-cookie-cutter itineraries into parts of the river that larger cruises can't reach. Plus Oberoi's private piers mean ultimate discretion, not to mention unrivalled accessibility. Oberoi is also proud to be among the only luxury Nile cruisers that welcome those with physical disabilities and mobility issues – that's how you do 'diversity, discovery and discernment!'

Another global brand big on diversity is the Langham Hospitality Group, especially with the expansion of its vibrant next-gen lifestyle brand, **Ying 'nFlo**. Already launched in their native Hong Kong, the portfolio will feature hotels with a youthful cultural and social offering, but also heavy doses of diversity and inclusion – focused on everything from belonging to belonging for LGBTQ+ travellers. The brand sets to align perfectly with younger, aspirational OutThere travellers, the young-at-heart, or anyone that might enjoy a 'Jelly Belly' themed room, for that matter. We already love the delectably pink parent brand Langham Hotels, but we're rather excited to monitor the trajectory of this new launch.

Speaking of lifestyle brands, the good folk at Marriott International are telling us that 'lifestyle is the new luxury'. Its **W Hotels** brand is evolving into something much more sophisticated (although we'd only really travel to a select few this year... many of its old properties will need a refurbishment to catch up) while still retaining its signature 'Whatever/Whenever' exuberance. The brand's hotels in Sydney and Rome have made quite a splash on the luxury landscape since they opened, and there are even more Italian debuts to come – Florence, Milan and Naples. We're also told that the **Ritz Carlton** brand is now appealing to younger, more lifestyle-driven travellers. The 2023 openings of The Ritz Carlton in hip Melbourne and Portland are the proof in the pudding, but we're looking forward to getting out to the newly renovated Dallas property in Las Colinas and onboard The Ritz Carlton Yacht Collection's second ship, *Ilma* this year.



From top: Langham Hospitality Group's disrupter brand Ying n'Flo with its youthful perspective and dedication to inclusion will change the landscape of hospitality in Hong Kong and beyond; the W Rome heralds the Marriott-owned brand's reaffirming of its position in luxury-lifestyle; the 'Jabu Ladies' project at Jabulani in the Kruger empowers local women; Azumi Setoda near the Seto Inland Sea turns the traditional Japanese ryokan concept on its head; Cookoon brings celebrity chefs out of their kitchens for private dining experiences in hand-selected venues across the city of Paris; and J.K. Place may be known for its hotels across Europe, but has sights set on the Americas. (Photography courtesy of respective brands)

Over in the Kruger National Park in South Africa, **Jabulani** owner and **The Herd Trust** conservation leader Adine Roode – a second-generation safari owner-operator – has initiated a rather OutThere tourism-driven social enterprise. The **Jabu Ladies** project aims to inspire, enlighten and empower local community women to create a unique collection of hand-made items and earn an income for themselves and their families. But beyond the purpose-driven ethos of female-owned Jabulani being inspiring, it is also a special place to safari and is part of the Relais and Chateaux family.

Another delicious cocktail of tourism and community engagement that has caught our eye can be found near Japan's Seto Inland Sea in Setouchi. **Azumi Setoda** (a concept dreamt up by Aman's founder Adriano Zecha) takes the traditional ryokan concept – set in the reimagined family estate of the Horiuchi family in Hiroshima – and gives it some contemporary European panache with elegant Japan-di design, French-Japanese fusion dining and the unique partnership with the local, once thriving denim manufacturing industry. We love that this shakes up the usual Japanese holiday experience and shows that there's far more to Japan than the traditional 'geisha and samurai' type offering.

We are equally excited about a foodie challenger brand that hails from Paris, France. **Cookoon Club** is a culinary concierge that is making waves in the French capital and taking the city's most lauded chefs out of their restaurants to create private dining experiences anywhere... but mostly at some 40 private venues in the city. They aim to highlight the diversity of French gastronomy up close and personal, for those who value discretion or are planning a unique celebration. And the news is that they will soon be expanding to London. We can't wait to dine with them in either capital.

Full circle, we come back to the Med. There's no need to persuade us to visit a **J.K. Place** hotel, especially the flagship J.K. Place Capri... the talk of the jet-set. It has been on our travel itch list forever. So we resolve this year to make it to the Italian Riviera, and their other boutique, private-club-like properties across Europe. But we may be travelling further afield with the brand soon, as owner Ori Kafri has world domination on his mind. While dedicated to the exceptional, personalised 'Savile Row, not Armani' style hospitality at his current properties, he tells us that he'd be very interested in expanding into the USA and perhaps even Uruguay. So, watch this space, we may be unexpectedly pond-hopping sooner than we think!