



# THE GALLIVANTER'S GUIDE<sup>®</sup>

*Top of  
the  
Tents.*



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SETTING THE BENCHMARK FOR HIGH-END TRAVELLERS

**B**ack in the early 1990s, the idea of a tent being luxurious was positively laughable. Then Adrian Zecha came along and, alongside designer, Jean Michel Gathy, he built 20 tented suites on the remote Indonesian island of Moyo. In 1993, Amanwana suddenly hit the headlines when the late Princess Diana came to stay. We arrived two weeks later and

## UNDER CANVAS

discovered that being under canvas can be rather more magical than we anticipated. The rest is history. In 1998, The Oberoi Rajvilas in Jaipur, India, built some chic tented suites as an accommodation option; then in 1999, they created the 25-tent Oberoi Vanyavilas in Ranthambore's tiger reserve. Luxury tents were catching on, as in the same year, Emirates opened Al Maha in the Dubai



Tent #1 overhangs the rapids, at Shinta Mani Wild, in southern Cambodia's Cardamom National Park.

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READ BY THE WORLD'S TOP TRAVELLERS IN 42 COUNTRIES, SINCE 1991.



*View from the deck of Tent #1, at the new Shinta Mani Wild, in southern Cambodia's unsullied Cardamom National Park.*

desert. Interestingly, it was Bill Bensley who created the landscaping for those Oberoi hotels, long before he turned to architecture and design, so perhaps this was an influence when he designed Four Seasons Tented Camp in Thailand's Golden Triangle, which opened in 2005. Another interesting fact is that the opening General Manager there was Jason Friedman, who now works alongside Bensley, project-managing many of his latest properties, such as the 23-room Rosewood Luang Prabang, which offers luxury tents, and, coming in December, the tented Shinta Mani Wild in Cambodia. The world at large, meanwhile, created the moniker 'glamping' to describe glamorous camping; but here, our attention rests firmly on the structured, super-comfortable high-end tents, from which you can view everything from Arabian Oryx, to elephants and tigers.

### **Shinta Mani Wild, Cambodia.**

Opening this December in southern Cambodia's Cardamom National Park, this is the latest escape from the Bensley Collection, with just 14 1-bedroom tents and one 2-bedroom.

Designed very much for adventurous adults, no children under 13 are allowed, but if your kids are in their teens, then this Indiana Jones style camp could be just the answer to wean them from their iPads.

With its signature Raiders of the Lost Ark swaying suspension bridge, that we first experienced at Four Seasons Tented Camp, your arrival can either be via jeep or via a heart-stopping 1,250 foot zip line that flies you over the river and waterfalls, arriving at the Landing Zone Bar, where your 'Bens-

sley Butlers' await with refreshments.

This is an all-inclusive resort, with a 3-night minimum stay that includes all meals, drinks, activities, spa treatments and land transfers from Phnom Penh (2 hours) or Sihanoukville airports.

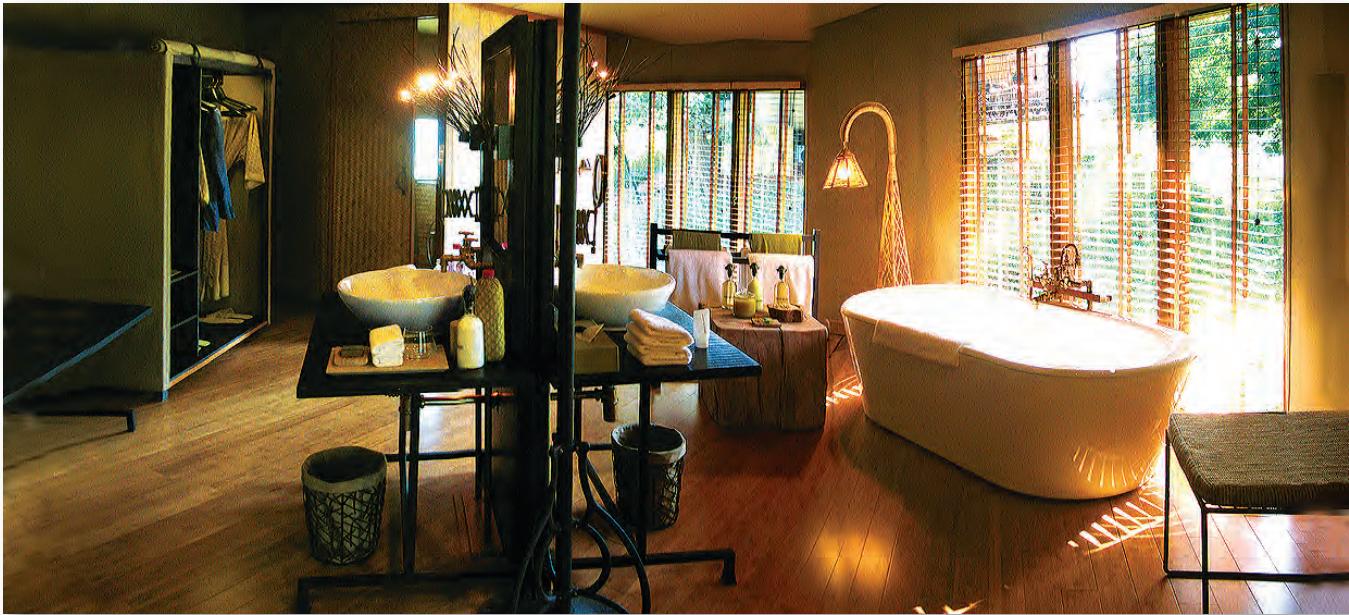
The inspiration came from Jackie Onassis' 1967 journey through Cambodia with King Sihanouk, and an attempt has been made to offer a wholly sustainable, chemical-free environment, from foraged and fresh produce in Chef, Kien Wagner's virtually menu-free Waterfall Restaurant, to locally-made products in the Boulder's Spa.

A team of naturalists are on hand, along with the resort's own expedition boat with kayaks, so you can explore the waterways, with their rare flora and fauna.

Eclectic, original and adventurous, Shinta Mani Wild is not for everyone; but your



*The super private tented suites at Taj Banjaar Tola all offer riverine aspects; the Kanha National Park just 10 minutes away.*



*Bathroom of Tent #3, at Taj Banjaar Tola, opens onto an outdoor shower.*

teenage kids will love it.

[shintamani.com/wild.php](http://shintamani.com/wild.php)

**Taj Banjaar Tola,  
Madhya Pradesh, India.**

Opened in 2009 and wholly appropriate for this Indian safari location, Banjaar Tola is just 10 minute's drive from Kanha National Park; the butler-serviced tented suites divided into two sets of nine, both with river-edge views and their own camp managers, chefs, spa services and outdoor pool.

I prefer the breezier West Camp, especially the very private #3; built, as with all the tents, on high stilts, with hardwood floors and spacious terraces overlooking the water. The beds are incredibly comfortable and after a long morning looking for tigers in Kanha Safari park, a massage on your

deck is absolute bliss.

The camps are a joint venture between Taj and AndBeyond, so the naturalists and guides are exceptionally knowledgeable.

**Then Adrian Zecha  
came along and  
built 20 tented suites  
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Indonesian island of  
Moyo...**

Mid October is, for me, the perfect time to go, even though there is less game at this time of year, as it is cooler and greener than in the hot months.

Meals are taken in various locations and are invariably a pleasant surprise, set around a camp fire, on your deck or by the pool; the largely organic regional cuisine, superb.

Kanha is much lusher than the more popular Ranthambore in eastern Rajasthan and is the closest you will get in India to an African safari. OK, there are no lions, but there are tigers, leopards, deer and over 300 varieties of birds.

[taj.tajhotels.com](http://taj.tajhotels.com)

**Four Seasons Tented Camp,  
Golden Triangle, Thailand.**

I have stayed here since the resort first opened in 2005 and have, over the years, experienced it at the height of the summer and in the wettest of rainy seasons. It has never failed to delight me.



*A very peaceful deck at Taj Banjaar Tola, where massage tables can be set up after a long day in Kanha's tiger reserve.*



*Overlooking the Ruak River, with Burma and Laos in the distance, the tented suites at Four Seasons Tented Camp, Chiang Rai, sit in their own elephant reserve.*

During the dry season, the arrival by boat along the Ruak River, with Burma and Laos in the misty distance, is a wonderful piece of theatre; but even if you arrive by jeep from the airport at Chiang Rai, the sense of discovery as the resort is unveiled gives one childish pleasure.

I cannot stop myself singing the theme tune from the film, Raiders of the Lost Ark, as I traverse the swaying suspension bridge that links one set of tented suites with the other; 15 in total and all themed in slightly different ways.

Stop off in the early evening at the Bur-

ma Bar for cocktails and watch the sun dip across the triangle; your fellow guests mostly eager to chat as they compare the day's elephant riding experiences and the care

and to the fabulous outdoor shower. Inside, you have the bedroom and sitting area, together with a roll-top bathtub and twin vanities.

The chic, open-sided Nong Yao Restaurant serves excellent local and International fare, whilst the dedicated Wine Cellar caters remarkably well to the most fastidious of European palates. The wine and food tasting sessions here are definitely de rigueur.

There is a tiny but beautiful 2-room al-fresco Spa hidden away in the jungle, where you can recover with a massage after a morning's elephant riding, which is much to be recommended; the oils sourced locally.

Most guests wish they had stayed longer



*Landing jetty, at Four Seasons Tented Camp.*

that the Mahouts show for these lovingly rescued pachyderms.

At night, you are tucked up in your tented suite; the bed like a big, fluffy nest, and all you hear is the see-saw of a gecko and the munching of bamboo as the elephants feed.

I do not have a preference for which tent to choose, as they are all rather splendid; but I would opt for the Deluxe variety, such as 'Burmese' as they have jacuzzis on their decks.

The tents, which look down upon the green plains and the river, have zippered windows and doors, to the deck, to the loo



*Suspension bridge, at Four Seasons Tented Camp.*



*Outdoor shower, at Four Seasons Tented Camp.*



*The deck of a Deluxe Tent, replete with jacuzzi, at Four Seasons Tented Camp, in Thailand's Golden Triangle.*

here, as the sense of peace and gentle pleasures are hard to beat.

[fourseasons.com/goldentriangle](http://fourseasons.com/goldentriangle)



*The elegant interior of a tented suite, at Four Seasons Tented Camp, Golden Triangle, Thailand.*

#### **Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa, Dubai.**

When Al Maha first opened in 1999, it was owned and managed by the airline, Emirates, and was thought to be a way of offsetting their carbon footprint, as with their Australian eco-resort Wolgan Valley.

Subsequently, Emirates brought in management companies to run both resorts; with Marriott's Luxury Collection taking over Al

the dunes, and inside, even in an entry-level Bedouin Suite, there is plenty of space, with a junior-suit style layout and a curving bathroom behind the bedroom.

This 86-square-mile site holds just 42 tented suites, including two Royal Suites, two Emirates Suites and one Presidential. Having stayed in various categories, I found the Bedouin Suites to be wholly acceptable

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**Every tent has  
its own pool,  
overlooking  
the dunes...**

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for a couple, but if you do need more room, then the butler-serviced 2-bedroom suites, such as the Royals, are wonderfully eclectic, accessorised with Bedouin artifacts and French-style sofas.

For dinner, you can either opt for the 5-



*Every tented suite at Al Maha, has a private pool overlooking the dunes, where Arabian Oryx can often be seen.*

course table d'hôte in the Al Diwan restaurant, or sit on the adjoining deck for à la carte, which is my preference.

During the day, the camp's field guides will organise everything, from falconry, archery, horse and camel riding, to nature walks and desert drives; then before dinner, you can spend an hour or so in the Timeless Spa, check out the Library or enjoy a little retail therapy in the Gallery.

I find that two nights here is sufficient; the experience a very pleasant contrast to the buzz of Dubai.

[marriott.com/luxury/dubai](http://marriott.com/luxury/dubai)



Dining on the deck, at Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa, Dubai.

fact that you are tempted to forget that you are here to spot a Bengal tiger or two in

gold thread.

At night, as the temperature falls, your cushy kingsize is warmed by hot water bottles and your bathrobes are, of course, silk. You ease the tensions of the day by soaking in the Victorian style hip bath, or under the remarkably powerful shower, ready for another day in the Tiger Reserve, with its panthers, cheetahs, sloth bears and antelopes, as kingfishers dive through the sunbeams. Camping was never like this.

[oberoihotels.com](http://oberoihotels.com)



The main pool, at Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa.

#### **The Oberoi Vanyavilas, Ranthambore, India.**

Opened in 1999 and set in 20 manicured acres, enveloped by the Aravalli and Vindhya mountains of Western Rajasthan, Vanyavilas makes no pretence at rusticity. There are winding lily ponds, stocked with carp and cooled by fountains; the warm air filled with clouds of green parrots.

The resort, with its 25 butler-serviced tented suites, was modelled on the Indian hunting palaces of old, which were as far from the concept of camping as one could imagine. Consequently, there is everything here you could wish for, from a tranquil outdoor pool, a proper haveli-style Spa, a mar-

the nearby Tiger Reserve.

All the suites are identical; furnished with Victorian style steam ship chests, bound with brass; the central fourposter draped with gauze and the embroidered tented ceiling tracing images of Dhok trees in glinting

#### **Amanwana, Moyo, Indonesia.**

Opened in 1993, Amanwana was my first experience of high-end tented living and, to be honest, I was none too keen back then, as for us Amanjunkies, it was a tad too



A tented suite, at the hugely civilised The Oberoi Vanyavilas, in Ranthambore, India.

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Vanyavilas makes  
no pretence  
at rusticity

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led, chandeliered entrance hall and a walled restaurant terrace, centrepieced by a flaming brazier.

Indoors, there is a games room, a billiards room and a fireplaced Bar; so civilised in



Front-row Ocean Tents, at Amanwana, are by far the best choice; the waves lapping across 100-year-old coral. pared-back. Over the years, however, the resort slowly blossomed and ironed out the wrinkles, and I grew to love it.

With just 20 tented suites, designed by Jean-Michel Gathy, this get-away-from-it-all desert island in the Flores Sea teaches you

dress, no electronic devices; just impossible pink sunsets, golden orioles and days snorkelling, diving, boating or just marvelling at a newly hatched turtle or the untouched 100-year old coral that edges the lapping waves.

the Jungle Cove Spa, with a soundtrack of waves lapping on the shore, and then hearty fare in the open-sided restaurant; much of the produce from the island's own organic gardens.

The identical tented interiors are cool and minimal, with shower-only bathrooms, but I would always opt for a front-row Ocean Tent for their privacy and views. I like #4 and #6, as they are very central to everything, but if you really want to hide away, then opt for a tent near the Jungle Cove Spa, such as #20.

Moyo island comprises around 80 acres of pristine jungle, replete with curious monkeys and deer. Trekking is, of course, a popular option; the best hike being to the waterfalls. There is no pool as such, but there is a clever man-made rock pool by the jetty, which is great for cooling down.

The easiest way to arrive is by the 65-minute, 8-passenger floatplane from Denpasar Airport in Bali; but at certain times of year, the planes do not fly, so you must, instead, fly to Sumbawa island, then take the Aman boat from the resort's beautiful pavilion jetty and sail for around an hour to Moyo. Both experiences are uplifting in their own ways.

[aman.com/resorts/amanwana](http://aman.com/resorts/amanwana)



Shrouded in trees, the Jungle Suites at Amanwana, on the second row, are less viewsome.

how to leave your 21st Century baggage behind and reconnect with the simple things in life. No gourmet dining, no little black

Even if you are not au fait with water sports, there is much to appreciate here. Yoga on the pavilion, gentle treatments in



Spacious interiors, with the shower-only bathroom tucked away at the rear, Amanwana's tented suites are decidedly comfortable.

# GALLIVANTER'S *Gossip*



**A**S A SIXTH LODGE IS ANNOUNCED FOR **Amankora**, Bhutan, I was instead drawn to the new **Bhutan Spirit Sanctuary**, owned by Dutchman, Louk Lennaerts, which is, if anything, more Aman than Aman in its sleek design. This is **Bhutan's** first resort that is dedicated to wellness and includes a 14-bed Spa with a heated indoor pool, traditional medicine consultations and endless calm spaces for meditation and yoga. Just 25 minutes from Paro, the Sanctuary has just two room types; Balcony or Terrace, and its all-inclusive rates cover farm-to-table fare in the restaurant. [bhutanspiritsanctuary.com](http://bhutanspiritsanctuary.com)

**T**HE EX GENERAL MANAGER of La Réserve Geneva, Laurent Branover has re-emerged as General Manager of the delightful **Domaine des Etangs** in Massignac, South West France, near Cognac. Set in an 11th Century château, the hotel has just 29 rooms, suites and cottages, in a private estate of 2,500 acres. Attractions include a floating lakeside tennis court, art gallery, two swimming pools and a Michelin-starred restaurant overseen by Loïc Lecoin. The striking contemporary interior design is by Isabelle Stanislas, which incorporates a raft of museum quality artworks, from Picasso to Irina Rasquinet. [domainedesetangs.com](http://domainedesetangs.com)

**L**OOKING AHEAD to 2023, **Rosewood** have two very interesting hotel projects in store for us. Bravely, they are tackling the Indian market for the first time, with the **New World Jaipur Resort**; but I wonder if this 181-villa property is a little large for the high-end market, given that Oberoi and Taj have Jaipur sewn up so well. Also scheduled for 2023 is **Rosewood Hermana Mayor** in the Philippines, set on a private island, just 10km from the mainland. Not long to wait, though, for **Rosewood Venice**, which opens in 2020 in the 15th Century Palazzo Dona' Giovannelli, with around 50 rooms and suites.

**I**WAS GRATIFIED TO SEE A NEW and rather gorgeous resort in **Siem Reap**, Cambodia. The **Treeline Urban Resort** opens this month, with 36 rooms and 12 suites and is set on the banks of the Siem Reap River. There are two restaurants, a coffee shop and the Suri Spa, which uses natural local products. Opt for one of the Executive Suites on the 3rd floor, which are super elegant. [treelinehotels.com](http://treelinehotels.com)

**A**FTER SPENDING \$60 million on a massive year-long refurbishment, **The Datai**, Langkawi, Malaysia, reopens next month, with three new Rainforest Pool Villas and a new 5-bedroom The Datai Estate. The refurbishment was led by Paris-based Didier Lefort, of DL2A, who worked, back in 1993, with the resort's original architect, the late Kerry Hill. [thedatai.com](http://thedatai.com)

**T**HE NEXT HOTSPOT FOR AFRICAN SAFARI LOVERS IS **Rwanda**. After the opening of **One&Only's Nyungwe House** last month, the group is set to open a second lodge in summer 2019 - **One&Only Gorilla's Nest**. Rwanda is the lead destination for Gorilla tracking, so it is not surprising that top safari experts, **Singita**, are also opening their **Kwitonda Lodge**, on the edge of Volcanoes National Park, in August 2019.

**O**PENING IN January 2019 is **Mandarin Oriental Jumeirah**, Dubai, billed as a super glamorous beachfront resort. The interiors, by Jeffrey Wilkes look marvellous, but I am less taken with the somewhat mundane exterior architecture. Also opening next year, in April, is the long-awaited **The Oberoi Marrakech**. Finally!

**P**LEASE DO NOT FORGET TO VOTE in our 2018 **Gallivanter's Awards for Excellence**. The closing date for submitting your forms is 30 November, in this, the industry's most respected hotel poll.

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