

VANITY FAIR

MARCH 2014

ON TRAVEL

AFRICA

THE CASE FOR ZIMBABWE

Plus: TOP GUIDES *and*
SAFARIS FOR KIDS

By GRAHAM BOYNTON *and* LUCIA VAN DER POST

PERU

IF I CAN, YOU TOUCAN

By STEVE KING

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

MAKING FRIENDS AND
HAVING THEM FOR DINNER

By STANLEY JOHNSON

"One of the gladdest moments in
life is the departure upon a distant
journey into unknown lands."

—RICHARD BURTON

FRONTIERS, NEW AND OLD

There is travel and there is going on holiday. They are not mutually exclusive, but they require a different mindset and they have different goals. The former is a quest for a life experience, the latter a jolly bit of rest and recuperation, perhaps with a temple thrown in to stop one feeling guilty.

The question is whether or not we are running out of world now that we treat our planet as a playground. This edition of *Vanity Fair On Travel* explores some of the last frontiers that the intrepid traveller might brave. Stanley Johnson discovers the point of cannibalism in Papua New Guinea and Steve King goes all *Fitzcarraldo* to Iquitos in Peru, fortunately in a new boat on the Amazon, rather than hauling an old one over a mountain like Werner Herzog's eponymous hero. Sara Wheeler explores Russia's Black Sea Riviera, of which the beating heart is Sochi, and takes the waters in the old spa resort of Pyatigorsk. They don't make them like that anymore: a genteel architectural mishmash of fin-de-siècle and neo-renaissance crisscrossed with tree-lined boardwalks. Emma Freud interviews the man who created a new frontier in hoteldom, Nick Jones, creator of the Soho House phenomenon. Four Seasons is consistently the world's best hotel group, as proved by a seamless opening in notoriously difficult St Petersburg. It's a matter of frontier-busting faith. FS founder Isadore Sharp told me: "Luxury is a necessity, what people need in their lifestyle, we're just trying to make everyone more comfortable."

Sometimes geopolitical events make the familiar inaccessible, so, after a generation, rediscovery is essential, a whole new frontier. Graham Boynton, who was brought up in Zimbabwe, returns there. Before the economic holocaust, it was the top safari destination in Africa, and now travellers from America, Brazil and Europe are returning. Astonishingly, the extravagantly beautiful wilderness has survived, and so has the spirit of the people: friendly, warm, humorous and with the best-educated



guides. Boynton makes a powerful case that Zim deserves our support—the experience of travel hopefully is not all about us in these me-me-selfie days; it is also about a contribution to the places to which we travel.

Meanwhile, not three but four Graces (Victoria Hislop, Georgiana Boothby, Christopher Humphrys and Min Hogg) guide us to their favourite Greek islands; and I discovered that Newfoundland was exactly as written on the tin—a new land found to be the perfect digital detox if you kick back at the Fogo Island Inn.

I also rediscovered Venice. It's part of our DNA, but it takes a dramatic new hotel like the Aman Canal Grande to reignite the fire with a shot of contemporary and an insanely fabulous boat. India is an ongoing love affair, and I was thrilled to be in Coorg, an unsung Indian frontier made accessible

by the new Vivanta By Taj in the Western Ghats, an architectural marvel of eco-sensitivity, imagination and real adventure. There you can walk, hike and bike in unexplored territory imbued with the history of the Raj—in a good way—piqued with the exciting whisper of 15-foot cobras. I also went to the first Jodhpur One World Retreat (inspiration for *Hot Dates*, page 16), held by His Highness Maharaja Gaj Singh II of Jodhpur in aid of the Indian Head Injuries Foundation, and saw the wonderful Yuvraj Shivraj Singh Trauma Rehabilitation Centre at Jodhpur's Rajdada Hospital. It's a marvel, funded by the Maharaja's phenomenal determination since his son's polo accident. India has the most head injuries in the world; please support His Highness by giving to the indianheadinjuryfoundation.org.

Two momentous anniversaries this year: that of the First World War (I will be going to the battlefields with my godson, Lt-Col Alexander Turner DSO, author of three books on the battles, to find the grave of my grandfather, Lt Norman Mather, who died at the Somme), and the heroic Antarctic journey of Sir Ernest Shackleton, the most admirable British failure.

We will remember them.

—VICTORIA MATHER

VANITY FAIR ON TRAVEL

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BEST LIST

By VICTORIA MATHER



The Best SNOW DOG DELUXE

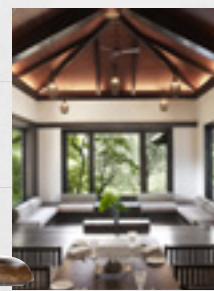
A hot dog that's half a baguette filled with wicked fondue and sausage at Snoasis, the new mountain restaurant in Gstaad so über-Gstaady that the window frames are lined with fur, the chandeliers are black cut glass and the huge vases filled not with flowers but champagne corks. Everything is homemade, from the truffle brie to the Toblerone-chocolate mousse, and if some like it hot, hot-water bottles will be brought, plus food for the real snowdogs and pillows for them to sunbathe on the deck. Come nighttime, sledge down the village by moonlight. snoasis.ch



Two views of Vivanta by Taj, Madikeri.

THE BEST *Revelation*

A bumpy journey up through tropical rainforest and then, with one giant leap from the limo, behold a panoramic view of unknown India. The new Vivanta by Taj, Madikeri, is in Coorg in the Western Ghats, where the cobras are 15 feet long and there are 1,214 forests. The 360 degree panorama from the lobby embraces



THE BEST SERVICE

This is a mystery wrapped inside an enigma. How has the new Four Seasons Lion Palace in St Petersburg managed to hit the ground running with immaculate smiley service? Not in a ghastly have-a-nice-day way but in a warm, charming and, of course, efficient way.

Russia is notoriously difficult for service, the Russians had a revolution in order never to have to serve anyone again and the word "bolshie" does not begin to describe the legacy of communism. Yet 250 staff already seem like oiled cogs in a mighty machine that is now the best hotel in Russia. The Lion Palace, built in 1820, has been spectacularly restored, the sweeping double marble staircase is so grand you'll feel inadequate without a tiara or white tie in order to descend it. The location is unbeatable: the hotel eyeballs St Isaac's Cathedral



The Four Seasons Lion Palace, with a view of St Isaac's Cathedral.

and is within view of the Hermitage; the bar is the best in Petersburg, with a real (yes, real) fireplace and you can smoke (yes, smoke! That old thing) fat cigars; the Italian restaurant, Percorso, is the best in either Petersburg or Moscow, in a series of adorable panelled rooms, like eating in a Tolstoy novel, with another real (yes, real) fire. The Asian restaurant, Sintoho, fires on all gastronomic

valleys, forest, mountains, wisps of mist and the glow from guest cottages below. It took seven years to build, and not a tree was cut nor a stone turned—this extraordinary eco-resort has the lowest carbon footprint on the subcontinent. Coorg is unique: the highest per capita income in India, over 90 percent literacy and old English-owned coffee plantation estates are preserved.

Choose to eat at either Nellaki, one of its restaurants specialising in Coorg food, or at a private dinner by the stream in the forest, or at the wonderful, whacky grill by the swimming pool. Hike, cycle, do pottery. Even the clay is local, from riverbeds near Mysore. greavesindia.com

cylinders, but, again, it is the immaculate service that makes it special. The winter garden, with its glass roof, makes other winter gardens look like Amdega conservatories. To take tea there in the winter is to drink Lapsang under a duvet of illuminated snow. Again, unparalleled service: you go once and on return lovely Ekaterina knows where you like to sit and how you like your eggs. The bedrooms are understated if bland (the lack of Russian art is a weakness) for which anyone who's experienced full-blown Russian bling should be grateful. The fifth-floor rooms have terraces overlooking the city, the Lobanov presidential suite has a colonnaded terrace so big Princess Kitty Obolensky could have held her ball there. Isadore Sharp, the founder of Four Seasons, indubitably the best hotel group in the world, has faith

in shop local: "I believe we can, from the local community anywhere in the world, achieve the same level of service, quality and consistency without compromise if you give individuals the opportunity to become their best self. How you treat people is how they will respond." Respect: that is the key to the Russian door. Four Seasons Moscow opens in the summer. steppestravel.co.uk

TICKET TO ACCESSORISE



CASE, £380, BY VICTORINOX



T-SHIRTS, FROM £115, BY EILEEN FISCHER



FEDORA, £130, BY BAMFORD



SANDALS, £425, BY MANOLO BLAHNIK



CASES, FROM £400, BY VIVIANNE WESTWOOD