

Condé Nast
Traveller

THE EXPERTS

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ZONE RANGERS

Get under the skin of the world's most exciting places with these finger-on-the-pulse gurus

JAMES GRACE-JAYASUNDERA AMPERSAND TRAVEL

SRI LANKA

Of Sri Lankan and English descent,

Grace-Jayasundera has been buzzing around the subcontinent all his life, but Sri Lanka is in his blood. He can ensure a super-lush five-star jaunt from start to finish if so desired, but his secret preference is for quirky details, and smaller, family-owned hotels run by upwardly mobile locals are his forte. He can help you decide which house you should take over for Christmas (perhaps the one on a private island that you reach by elephant, and that comes with its own chef), which beach to flop on and which towns to rev up in (Galle is fascinating). If you want to see monkeys and blue whales, to explore the ancient kingdoms of Ceylon (including the Temple of the Tooth), to hit the surf, or the tea plantations, this is the man to talk to. He is funny and flamboyant, with feelers extending into India, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia and the Maldives. His top picks this year include heli-skiing in Kashmir, temple hunting in Burma and trekking in remote east Bhutan.

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www.ampersandtravel.com

PAUL IRVINE DEHOUCHE

SOUTH AMERICA

Irvine, who lives the life of Riley on Leblon Beach in Rio, is the man

behind on-trend travel specialist Dehouche, set up with his old school-friend and fellow ex-City boy Henry Madden. He can be relied upon to provide loquacious opinion on any travel-related topic regarding the continent, and can conjure your South American adventure, from tours to see the Amazon's pink dolphins to the ultimate rock-star villa in Trancoso. Irvine knows where to go, when to go there, and crucially, why. His fetish is for small, achingly cool pousadas frequented by bronze-limbed, off-duty models; for wild, empty beaches (remarkably hard to find in Brazil); for the undiscovered street-food hangouts and hip bars of Rio; and for the epic safari in virgin wilderness tracts. He and his Rio-based crew will get you the best room, the most entertaining local character as a guide, the private lesson with an accoladed tangoist, and the kookiest transfer (whether by horse or speedboat), because he really cares about that sort of thing. If you don't have the best night out of your life in Rio, Irvine will consider it a personal failure.

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AMELIA STEWART SIMOON TRAVEL

MIDDLE EAST

Stewart knows precisely what any thinking traveller in the Middle East should be planning. She

cut her teeth in Libya, starting the business in 2004 when the country was relatively unknown on the international travel scene, while building on her experiences of travelling with the Tuareg in the deep south and exploring the Acacus Mountains to marvel at prehistoric rock art. In Iran she journeyed from Tehran to Shiraz, Persepolis and Esfahan, where she cultivated a trusted list of guides and families willing to take travellers in for meals, or open locked temple doors, and found the perfect caravanserai bolthole. Next on Stewart's list of Middle Eastern adventures came Lebanon, Jordan and Oman. Simoon Travel's journeys are in the small-group category, and feel remarkable, personalised and intrepid. No wonder Original Travel has bought the company, although Stewart remains mistress of her domain. And now she is also reaching out to Ethiopia, Uzbekistan, Georgia and the Caucasus, and newly calm Tunisia.

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MEHRA DALTON GREAVES TRAVEL

INDIA

It can be hard for other top-end India specialists to get a look in, because ultra-professional Greaves holds such a lockdown on the country. At the helm is elegant and eloquent ➤