

Painting classes in an Italian artist's studio. A sail down the Brazilian coast in a private yacht. An African safari led by a documentary filmmaker. A top travel advisor can help you turn your next vacation into the experience of a lifetime. In T+L's 13th annual A-List, we showcase the best specialists in the business—those who can both book you into sold-out hotels and introduce you to the most keyed-in local guides. Here, they reveal their favorite new hotels, destinations on the rise, and tips for making travel better.



CONGRATULATES  
THE A-LIST  
TRAVEL EXPERTS

*THE*

*LIST*

# Our 133 Top Travel Specialists

Edited by Amy Farley and Brooke Porter Katz. Reported by Stirling Kelso

# SUPER-AGENTS

These are the travel-industry all-stars, with the knowledge and connections to make any dream trip a reality.

## Maita Barrenechea

With three decades of on-the-ground travel-management experience in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, Barrenechea has the friends and the industry connections to arrange entrée into Buenos Aires's fashion circles, an equestrian getaway at a Patagonia estancia, or a high-roller beach weekend on the Uruguayan coast. She's happy to see that travelers are showing increasing interest in lesser-known cities (including Rosario, Argentina, with its beautiful Art Deco architecture) and in nature reserves such as Puerto Valle, where Argentinean ostriches and alligators roam.

*Trend watch* A handful of new hotels and resorts are set to attract luxury travelers to overlooked destinations in Chile. The 22-suite Viña Vik is opening in October on an 11,000-acre vineyard in central Millahue. Later this year in the heart of downtown, Santiago welcomes the high-design Singular, sister property to the lodge in Patagonia.

Mai10, Buenos Aires; 54-11/4314-3390; maita@mai10.com.ar.

## Jack S. Ezon ✓

Along with bespoke trips for individuals, Ezon plans nearly 30 celebrations around the world every year. To pull off these events, he has a party-planning department with unparalleled global connections. Though Ezon himself remains heavily involved in the details, picking out birthday venues in London, wedding bands in Punta Mita, and tasting menus at Cape Town restaurants. A former lawyer, he is an expert at negotiating on behalf of his clients and proudly cultivates a team that is skilled at keeping up with the demanding—and often last-minute—planning pace of today's travelers.

*Trend watch* Ibiza, Spain, a legendary party destination, is growing up, Ezon says, thanks to hotel openings such as Destino by Pacha and Ushuaia Beach Hotel. "It's becoming an alternative to St.-Tropez." He's also looking forward to new luxury cruise options in the Galápagos, including Silversea's *Silver Galápagos*.

Ovation Vacations, New York City; 800/977-5893;

jezon@ovationtravel.com.

## Lisa Lindblad

Lindblad's background in anthropology is reflected in her itineraries, which often include neighborhood and cultural tours led by historians and in-the-know locals. All of her recommendations are the result of in-depth research done on behalf of clients. When one recently expressed interest in visiting the Dominican Republic's northern coast, Lindblad flew there to scout hotels, houses, guides, and restaurants. She thinks of every journey as an opportunity for cultural exchange, and hopes her clients end each day with a story to tell.

*Trend watch* "Trips are becoming multi-vocational," Lindblad says, noting the ways people are engaging with their travels—making videos and learning new skills, such as cooking or playing an instrument. Lisa Lindblad Travel Design, New York City; 212/876-2554; lisa@lisalindblad.com.

## Mary Ann Ramsey ✓

Ramsey approaches her work with the mind-set of a financial planner, meeting with clients to discuss their long-term travel objectives and develop an execution plan. She maintains a master list of their goals and dream trips, and uses her frequent travels to vet destinations and experiences. Ramsey cruises regularly, and creating personalized shore excursions is one of her specialties. She also makes a point of flying various airlines to stay on top of new cabin layouts and designs.

*Trend watch* Scandinavia is becoming even more popular by both land and boat. "The scenery is spectacular, whether you are sailing through the Stockholm Archipelago or taking the Flâm Railway to hike Norway's Nærøyfjord, a UNESCO World Heritage site."

Betty Maclean Travel, Naples, Fla.; 800/856-8111; maryann@bettymacleantravel.com.

## Guy Rubin

When Rubin moved to China in 1994, he was surprised to find a dearth of resources for discerning travelers in a country so rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty. He and his wife and partner, Nancy Kim, set out to change that, and now lead China's most ambitious luxury tour operator. To keep up with the country's rapid transformation, Rubin is constantly inspecting new hotels—Beijing has seen the arrival of a Waldorf Astoria; a Rosewood and another Mandarin Oriental are still to come—and developing new experiences. In Hangzhou, he can

set up a tour of a pharmacy and museum with a practitioner of Chinese medicine; in Shanghai, he'll arrange a nightlife tour that explores the jazz scene.

*Trend watch* Rubin has seen increased interest in Chengdu, which is home to the giant panda, the heart of Sichuan cuisine, and the jumping-off point for a visit to the ancient archaeological site of Sanxingdui. A Ritz-Carlton recently opened in the city, and Temple House and a Six Senses are opening soon. Imperial Tours, Beijing; 888/888-1970; guy@imperialtours.net.

## Anne Morgan Scully ✓

Scully's clients can expect seamless trips that are full of surprises, from airport transfers in luxury cars to thoughtful amenities, such as a bottle of champagne, as they check in to their hotel rooms. She stresses the importance of well educated guides who are fantastic storytellers and local tastemakers who can enrich a trip with their insider knowledge. Having watched the cruise industry develop over the past 30 years, Scully is also an expert on luxury ships, from ocean liners to private yachts. She recently became the godmother to *Ingui*, a new Viking River Cruise ship.

*Trend watch* River cruising in Europe is booming, as Uniworld, Tauck, and Viking create more itineraries along the Rhône. Scully also notes an increased interest in U.S. national parks (Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon) among families looking for exclusive, skip-the-line trips.

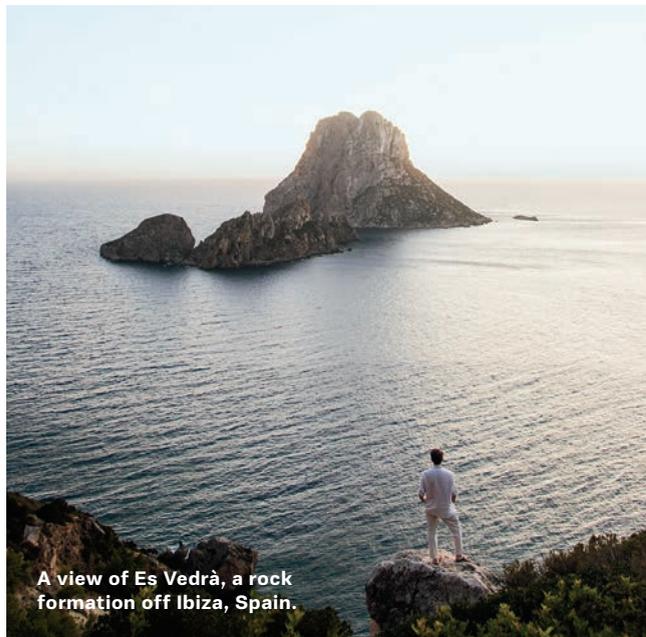
McCabe World Travel, McLean, Va.; 703/762-5055; anne@mccabeworld.com.

## Pallavi Shah

When Shah evaluates a destination, she goes beyond simply checking out hotels and restaurants. She dives into its historical context and cultural background. She is especially drawn to experiences that connect travelers with locals. In India, for example, she asks her favorite designers and craftspeople to open up their houses and studios and show guests the artistic process behind their textiles, clothes, and jewelry.

*Trend watch* A renewed desire to visit wellness destinations, ranging from sybaritic resorts such as CastaDiva, on Lake Como, in Italy, to top-notch medical spas in countries such as Italy, Turkey, and India.

 T+L's 2014 A-List is also available at [tandl.me/alist14](http://tandl.me/alist14).



A view of Es Vedrà, a rock formation off Ibiza, Spain.

On the cover: Ponte Sant'Angelo, in Rome. Photographed by Simon Watson.

*Our Personal Guest, New York City; 646/284-2454; opgny@ourpersonalguest.com.*

### **Jim Strong ✓ & Nancy Strong**

Attention to detail from the first meeting, accessibility (as a rule, their phone is answered on the first ring), and a contagious passion for travel define this mother-and-son team. They arm clients with both paper and digital copies of itineraries that are loaded with confirmation numbers and names, plus who to call for assistance at any hour. Proof of Jim's enthusiasm for his industry? He recently produced an off-Broadway play, *Craving for Travel*, about the trials and rewards of being an advisor.

*Trend watch* More high-budget clients are requesting "wheels-up to wheels-down" assistance to facilitate travel every step of the way. Guides not only reconfirm pickups and flight schedules, but even pre-scout restaurants before a meal, selecting the best table and informing the chef of food preferences and allergies.

*Strong Travel Services, Dallas; 214/361-0027; jim@strongtravel.com and nstrong@strongtravel.com.*

### **Valerie Ann Wilson**

Wilson is an industry influencer with 16 offices around the United States and more than 30 years of experience. She's chairman emeritus of Virtuoso's advisory board and a valued advisor for half a dozen luxury hotels and travel brands. She's also written two travel books and is on the road for more than a third of every year. Wilson and the staff of her top-notch agency (now also under the leadership of her daughters, A-Listers Jennifer Wilson-Buttigieg and Kimberly Wilson Wetty) are well traveled and highly organized. But they still enjoy the collaborative nature of trip planning with clients. "Part of the fun is hearing their ideas and vicariously traveling through each customer," Wilson says.

*Trend watch* The growth of multigenerational travel is staggering—and Wilson is part of the movement herself. This year, she is taking Seabourn's Baltic cruise with her children and grandchildren, where they'll trace her own mother's Swedish roots. *Valerie Wilson Travel, New York City; 212/532-3400; valeriew@vwti.com.*

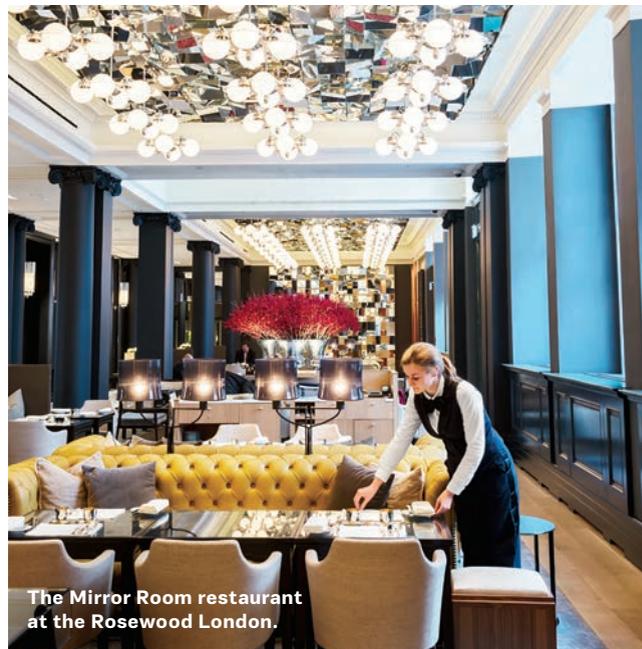
### **Joel A. Zack**

Concentrating on a small piece of the world—Portugal, Morocco, South Africa, Spain, and Turkey—and knowing these destinations inside and out gives Zack his edge. A

dedicated team and network of well-connected locals sustain the business, which grew out of Zack's own curiosity and expertise as an architect and historic preservationist. "We focus on people perhaps even more than place," he says of his guides. They can open doors to experiences ranging from visiting a bullfighter's private farm in Spain to leading a boys' soccer workshop in a South African township.

*Trend watch* Interest in experiential travel continues to grow, Zack says. "Few travelers start the process by telling us their hotel likes and dislikes. They want to find the ways a destination addresses their passion, whether that's art, music, history, or sports."

*Heritage Tours Private Travel, New York City; 800/378-4555; joel@htprivatetravel.com.*



## EUROPE

### CENTRAL EUROPE

#### **Nathalie Nagy**

A part-time Budapest resident who is fluent in both Hungarian and German, Nagy is skilled at showing travelers an insider's perspective on well-known places, including Prague and Vienna. But she also enjoys introducing travelers to off-the-beaten path destinations such as Romania, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Slovakia.

*Top tip* When in Austria, don't miss a performance at the state-of-the-art, 400-seat concert hall MuTH (Musik and Theater), which opened two years ago to house the legendary Vienna Boys' Choir.

*Years as agent* 17.

*Other specialty* Western Europe. *Protravel International, New York City; 212/409-9562; nathalie.nagy@protravelinc.com.*

#### **Ellison Poe**

This part of the world is a second home to Poe, who grew up in Vienna and travels regularly to Austria and neighboring countries. She has spent a lifetime in the travel industry (her parents founded Poe Travel 54 years ago), so she's got tricks up her sleeve for scoring last-minute tickets to the Vienna State Opera or planning a private trip to a Lipizzan horse farm.

*Insider clout* In Mělník, Czech Republic, a friend of Poe's will open

up his 14th-century castle overlooking the Elbe and Vltava rivers for a behind-the-scenes tour of the rooms and wine cellars.

*Years as agent* 28.

*Other specialty* India.

*Poe Travel, Little Rock, Ark.; 800/727-1960; epoe@poetravel.com.*

### FRANCE

#### **Murielle Blanchard**

Never satisfied with secondhand reviews, this Paris native makes a point of personally vetting all of her recommendations, from auberges and stores to festivals and markets. Only after she gives a place an "A" rating (most recently, to a handful of charcuteries and crêperies in Brittany) is it worthy of one of her tailor-made itineraries.

*Discovery* Le Jardin des Plumes, a restaurant and eight-bedroom hotel housed in a 1912 limestone *maison bourgeoise* in Giverny, outside Paris. The original marble mantel and Art Deco tile floors set the stage for a three-course lunch, with dishes such as pork confit with artichokes.

*Years as agent* 30.

*Other specialty* Italy.

*Black Pearl Luxury Services, Salt Lake City; 801/483-6533; murielle@blackpearlservices.com.*

#### **Bob Preston**

A graduate of France's INSEAD business school who has lived in the

French Alps and Paris, and on the Côte d'Azur, Preston prides himself on delivering exceptional access to his clients. He knows the country's influencers and tastemakers, and is able to open doors—a marquis's private estate just outside Paris, for example—that are typically off-limits to travelers.

*Special booking* For a family visiting Provence, Preston planned hands-on activities, including treasure hunts in remote villages in the Lubéron, Provençal cooking classes, and workshops with artists who are experts on Cézanne.

*Years as agent* 8.

*Other specialties* Italy and Switzerland.

*EuroPanache, New York City; 888/600-6777; bob.preston@europanache.com.*

## GERMANY

### Virginia Giordano

The Berlin-based Giordano is the cofounder and co-owner of Culture Trip, Germany's leading luxury travel agency. With her team of historians, architects, and specialist guides, she gets clients into private art collections and design studios, and can arrange introductions to personalities from the country's diplomatic, business, and (of course) cultural circles.

*Insider clout* For a group interested in Cold War history, Giordano organized a dinner with the head of the East German Secret Police, who evaded Western intelligence for so long that he was known as "the man without a face."

*Years as agent* 20.

*Culture Trip Germany, Berlin; 49-30/305-3890; info@culturetrip.de.*

## GREECE

### Mina Agnos

Agnos, who spends six to eight months a year in Greece, builds her itineraries with an exacting eye for detail. She makes both scheduled and incognito visits to preferred hotels (updating her list of go-to rooms, plus those to avoid) and meets with her hand-selected guides and drivers. Agnos even hangs out at regional airports to ensure the pickup process runs smoothly. Her staff also experience it all firsthand so they can share everything with clients, "down to the views, sounds, and smells."

*Special booking* Agnos created a series of tasting tours in Athens for a group of foodies. The itinerary included visits to meat markets, spice sellers, and modern agoras, allowing time to sample coffees, sweets, produce, and Greek liquors.

*Years as agent* 13.

*Other specialties* Turkey, Spain, and

Italy.

*Travelive, Bloomfield, N.J.; 888/377-5483; mina@travelive.com.*

### Christos Stergiou

A champion of experiential travel in off-the-beaten-path areas of Greece, Stergiou introduces travelers to boutique hotels, private farms and wineries, and guides who have a knack for storytelling. Based in a suburb of Athens, Stergiou—who gave a Tedx talk about entrepreneurship and his company, TrueGreece—makes a point of meeting clients in person when possible.

*Excited about* The quiet island of Spetses, just off the eastern coast of the Peloponnese: "No cars are allowed, so people get around by water taxi, motorbikes, and horse-drawn carriages." You can catch the water taxi there from the increasingly popular village of Porto Heli on the mainland, near the two-year-old Amanzo'e resort.

*Years as agent* 10.

*Other specialties* Turkey and Italy. *TrueGreece, Maroussi, Greece; 800/817-7098; christos@truegreece.com.*

### Petros Zissimos

When Zissimos took over his family business a decade ago, he saw great potential in Greece's affordable-luxury market. By relying on personal contacts rather than third-party planning companies, he can craft personalized itineraries (surprise yacht trips along the Bosphorus; private cooking classes on a farm in Crete) often at a lower price than his competitors.

*Special booking* For a client planning a marriage proposal in the Cyclades, Zissimos not only secured suites and tables at some of the region's top resorts and restaurants but he also made sure transportation was seamless, with private catamaran rides instead of ferries. For the question-popping night, he arranged a five-course meal on a beach in Mykonos, complete with candles and a small band.

*Years as agent* 10.

*Other specialty* Turkey. *Hellenic Holidays, New York City; 212/944-8288; pzissimos@hellenicholidays.com.*

## IRELAND

### Carol Cornell

Cornell is equally skilled at finagling coveted tee times, snagging prime tables at Dublin pubs on St. Patrick's Day, and assisting travelers in tracing their ancestry via her Rolodex of historians, professors, and church record-keepers. She always provides detailed walking

and driving directions throughout the country's vast, and often confusing, countryside.

*Excited about* The rising popularity of cottage rentals—perfect for families and groups—in areas such as County Cork and Connemara. She personally vets any house before recommending it to a client.

*Years as agent* 30.

*Other specialty* Italy. *Covington Travel, Fort Wayne, Ind.; 260/402-6789; carolc@covingtontravelinc.com.*

## ITALY

### Joyce Falcone

In the past few years alone, Falcone has hiked her way across Elba, skied the Dolomites, sailed from Sicily to Naples, rented houses in Venice and Chianti, and slept in innumerable boutique hotels—all for the sake of delivering exceptional insights for her clients. The dual American and Italian citizen tailors trips to her clients' interests (Slow Food; art history; design), but also makes a point of expanding their horizons.

*Excited about* The spectacular Giardino di Ninfa, built around the ruins of the ancient Roman village of Ninfa: "The gardens present a magical view of nature and antiquity intertwined."

*Years as agent* 19.

*The Italian Concierge, Far Hills, N.J.; 888/674-3311; info@italianconcierge.com.*

### Emily FitzRoy

On her monthly visits to Italy, FitzRoy hits the big cities as well as lesser-known corners to find hidden gems. She can lead you to the backstreets of Bari, where women sell fresh orecchiette from their front doors. In Maremma, Tuscany, she has an exclusive villa with private access to the Tarot Garden. And she'll book you at the 10-room boutique hotel Don Ferrante, set in a humble fishing village in Puglia.

*Insider clout* For a wedding in Venice, FitzRoy transformed an unused boatyard into a party space and arranged a concert by a local Gypsy band. The next night, the group attended a performance at the Venice Opera House, arriving at the secret backstage entrance via Riva boats.

*Years as agent* 17.

*Bellini Travel, London; 44-20/7602-7602; emily@bellinitravel.com.*

### Andrea Grisdale

Based in Como, Italy, Grisdale has a knack for innovation: she recently developed her own app so that clients could have easy access to their travel plans. She takes a similar approach to her itineraries, finding

novel ways to personalize and enrich them, from offering a behind-the-scenes look at the historic Palio horse race in Siena to planning a tour of the islands off the Amalfi Coast by kayak.

*New favorite* The J.K. Place Roma. "It ticks all of the boxes: elegance, warmth, a fantastic location, excellent service, and a sense of place in each of the 30 individually designed rooms."

*Years as agent* 22.

*IC Bellagio, Bellagio, Italy; 39-031/952-059; andrea@icbellagio.com.*

### Uri Harash

Harash, who settled in Rome in 2001, is skilled at immersing travelers in his adopted country. For painters, he can coordinate classes with an artist in her private studio in Trastevere. If you're a fan of Formula One, he'll put you in a Ferrari race car for a spin around the track. His love of Italian culture extends to his detailed itineraries, which include inspiring photographs.

*Top tip* If you're in the market for a fine, tailor-made suit in Rome, stop by La Camiceria di Piero Albertelli, whose clients include Valentino and other Italian VIP's.

*Years as agent* 15.

*Perfetto Traveler, Rome; 39-345/040-6396; info@perfettotraveler.com.*

### Beth Rubin ★

While she can plan romantic trips to Florence or family vacations to Rome, Rubin encourages travelers look beyond popular destinations. In Calabria, she has helped clients track their ancestors. From Milan, she's set up excursions to cities such as Mantua and Cremona. Even on classic itineraries, Rubin tempts clients with innovative day trips or excursions, such as an overnight at the Casa Fabbrini farmhouse, in Tuscany, where the owners prepare lunch straight from the garden.

*New favorite* The 18-room D.O.M Hotel Rome, housed in a monastery and located on what Rubin considers the Eternal City's most beautiful street. "With all of the hullabaloo surrounding the new J.K. Place Roma—and rightly so—this lovely property flew under the radar."

*Years as agent* 14.

*Other specialty* Croatia. *Select Italy, Chicago; 800/877-1755; beth@selectitaly.com.*

### Marjorie Shaw

Shaw's Roman roots can be traced back to her grandfather, who moved to the Italian capital from New York in 1919 to take up a post at the American Embassy. She was raised in Rome and lives there now with her husband and two children. Their frequent explorations of Italy have

made her an expert in family travel, though honeymoon and group trips are also in her wheelhouse. She can pull strings for private food and wine experiences in Puglia and insider art and history tours in Venice.

*Special booking* For a client who wanted to relive childhood summers on the Mediterranean—especially the taste and smell of sun-warmed figs—Shaw planned a late-September trip (when the fruit is at its peak) along the Amalfi Coast. The client and his wife took cooking classes and gathered wild figs on guided hikes.

*Years as agent* 25.

*Other specialty* Family travel in Italy.

*Insider's Italy, Rome*; 914/470-1612; [info@insidersitaly.com](mailto:info@insidersitaly.com).

## PARIS

### Yaron Yarimi

Yarimi—who considers Paris to be in a “constant state of rebirth and reinvention”—owes his encyclopedic, finger-on-the-pulse knowledge to extensive research trips, which take him beyond the expected hotels and museums to super-local flea markets, after-hours clubs, and fledgling restaurants. Before each trip, he briefs his clients on local customs, tipping, and upcoming events they may be interested in attending.

*Insider clout* For a couple celebrating their anniversary in Paris, he arranged a private cooking class with chef Alain Passard of L'Arpège and after-hours tours of both the Musée d'Orsay and Chartres Cathedral.

*Years as agent* 20.

*Other specialty* Italy.

*Frosch, New York City*; 212/784-0391; [aron.yarimi@frosch.com](mailto:aron.yarimi@frosch.com).

## RUSSIA

### Greg Tepper

Genuine VIP experiences in Russia (curator-led tours of St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum; a behind-the-scenes look at the Bolshoi Theater) require serious connections, which Tepper has in spades. He founded Exeter while working and living in Russia, and now travels to the country no fewer than five times a year. His guides are among the very best in the country.

*Insider clout* Only a certain number of people per day are allowed into the new Fabergé Museum, located in the Shuvalov Palace in St. Petersburg, but Tepper's clients get no-line, priority access and a private tour with an English-speaking guide.

*Years as agent* 20.

*Other specialty* Eastern Europe.

*Exeter International, Tampa, Fla.*; 800/633-1008; [greg@exeterinternational.com](mailto:greg@exeterinternational.com).

## SCANDINAVIA

### Tor Jensen

A former Scandinavian Airlines executive, Jensen has crisscrossed the region for decades. (It helps that he's fluent in Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian.) His talents range from setting up complicated adventure trips—sea kayaking in Norway; crossing Greenland on dogsled—to securing coveted reservations at Noma, in Copenhagen.

*Excited about* Greenland, where a Jensen-stamped itinerary might include the Viking ruins at Qassarsuk and a boat tour of the Qoroq Ice Fjord.

*Years as agent* 21.

*Other specialty* Southeast Asia.

*Jensen World Travel, Wilmette, Ill.*; 800/853-6736; [tor@jensenworldtravel.com](mailto:tor@jensenworldtravel.com).

## SCOTLAND

### Claire Schoeder

Schoeder opens doors throughout the country thanks to her network of well-connected friends. Turn to her for private whisky-cellar tours, falcon hunts, and overnights on family estates. Some of her favorite trips, though, are relaxed drives with stops at top restaurants. If you have Scottish ancestry, ask about her genealogy and clan-history guide.

*New favorite* The Cromlix House, which opened in April, is set on 34 woodland acres in Perthshire. Of the 15 rooms, opt for one of the five beautifully restored suites, outfitted with claw-foot bathtubs and Arran Aromatics toiletries.

*Years as agent* 22.

*Other specialty* England.

*Century Travel, Atlanta*; 800/533-6336, ext. 4011; [claire@centurytvl.com](mailto:claire@centurytvl.com).

## SPAIN

### Virginia Irurita

A former banker, Irurita founded the Madrid-based Made for Spain as a way to share her enthusiasm for the country's history, culture, and laid-back lifestyle with travelers. Through her stable of nontraditional guides, including professional architects and writers, she plays the consummate insider host, arranging tapas crawls in Seville, sherry tastings in Cádiz, and designer studio visits in Madrid. Her team is always on call, ready to deal with any missed flight or other travel mishap.

*Excited about* The hotel Castell Son Claret, housed in a restored castle in the Majorcan countryside. Spacious rooms overlook the estate, which is filled with olive and palm trees.

Make reservations at Zaranda, its Michelin-starred restaurant, for seasonal dishes such as a terrine of partridge with foie gras, cabbage, and black truffles.

*Years as agent* 16.

*Other specialty* Food and wine.

*Made for Spain, Madrid*; 34/91-448-7275; [virginia@madeforspain.com](mailto:virginia@madeforspain.com).

## SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

### Joel A. Zack

*See Super-Agents.*

## SWITZERLAND

### Ilene Koenig

Switzerland is a notoriously expensive destination, but Koenig is skilled at finding great deals and working within various budgets. As a ski enthusiast, she knows the local slopes inside and out, including ritzy Zermatt; the more low-key towns of Andermatt, high up in the Gotthard pass; and Wengen, a car-free village accessible only by train.

*Discovery* “The charming town of Saas Fee feels like Zermatt thirty years ago,” Koenig says. Stay at the plush FerienArt Resort & Spa, with Alpine-themed rooms and a large wellness center.

*Years as agent* 29.

*Other specialty* Skiing.

*Let's Travel (a division of Plaza Travel), Santa Monica, Calif.*; 800/458-7477; [ilene@letstravel-sm.com](mailto:ilene@letstravel-sm.com).

## UNITED KINGDOM

### Ellen LeCompte

LeCompte—who went to school in England and lives part-time in a 17th-century cottage in the Cotswolds—will satisfy even the most zealous Anglophile. She can book special tours of Highclere Castle, where *Downton Abbey* is filmed, arrange tea with prominent members of the aristocracy, and secure box seats at Manchester United games.

*Top tip* Shoppers in London should check out V.V. Rouleaux for ribbons, tassels, and room trims. For designer consignment, don't miss Pandora Dress Agency.

*Years as agent* 23.

*Other specialty* Paris.

*Brownell Travel, Richmond, Va.*; 804/353-0075; [ellenl@brownelltravel.com](mailto:ellenl@brownelltravel.com).

### Linda M. Raymer

Raymer looks at each journey she creates in three parts: the planning process, the trip itself, and the stories you tell afterward. She will put together private dinners in country houses, a tour of London in a Mini Cooper, and an excursion to Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge, where you can play Tudor for a day.

*Insider clout* For a group of musicians, Raymer arranged a dinner in the crypt of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, as well as a private organ recital in Westminster Abbey. They also climbed to the top of the bell tower for a demonstration by the bell ringers.

*Years as agent* 30.

*Other specialties* Switzerland and Italy.

*Travelink, American Express Travel, Nashville*; 615/277-5146; [linda.raymer@travelink.com](mailto:linda.raymer@travelink.com).

### Susie Worthy

If it's high-end and exclusive experiences you want, this London-based advisor delivers: lunch and a match at the Guards Polo Club; private boat parties on the Thames; and front-row seats at the Old Vic Theatre with backstage passes to meet the actors.

*Excited about* The century-old Rosewood London on High Holborn, which was recently revamped for \$130 million. “The historic building has been wonderfully adapted without losing its Edwardian Belle Époque architectural features,” Worthy says. Stop by the Mirror Room (named for its ceilings) for afternoon tea.

*Years as agent* 28.

*Other specialty* Paris.

*Note* Worthy Events, London; 44-20/3051-5165; [susie@noteworthy.co.uk](mailto:susie@noteworthy.co.uk).

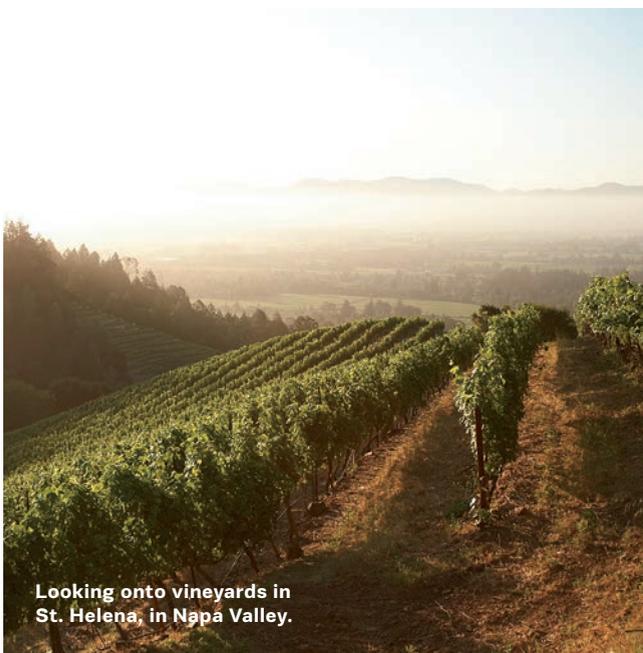
## WESTERN EUROPE

### Anne Morgan Scully ✓

*See Super-Agents.*

### Jim Strong ✓ & Nancy Strong

*See Super-Agents.*



Looking onto vineyards in St. Helena, in Napa Valley.

## U.S. & CANADA

### HAWAII

#### Carolyn Brandon

Brandon has used her 70-plus trips to Hawaii to develop key relationships with the people behind the state's top hotels and tour outfitters—useful when securing popular guides or booking rooms at sold-out properties. She has an eye for uncovering rain-forest hikes and other little-known adventure activities.

*Excited about* The 36-passenger Un-Cruise Adventures yacht, which sails from Molokai to Kona. On the seven-night voyage, the crew leads kayak tours along undeveloped shorelines and night swims with manta rays.

*Years as agent* 32.

*Other specialty* Cruises.

*Altour American Express Travel, Cupertino, Calif.; 650/248-2344; carolyne.brandson@altour.com.*

#### Marilyn Clark ★

Regular trips (usually four times a year) and a deep commitment to the destination have made Clark a trusted source even among locals—no easy feat in the tightly knit Hawaiian community. She's one of about 10 individuals to hold all Master Specialist certifications for the islands, which means she's had on-site training and passed exams on Hawaiian culture and history.

*New favorite* The Andaz Maui

at Wailea Resort. Maui's latest property has 297 rooms, but feels intimate thanks to private lanais. If you're visiting between January and April, you may see breaching whales from its Lehua Lounge, which is surrounded by cascading pools and waterfalls.

*Years as agent* 13.

*Other specialty* French Polynesia. *Lighthouse Travel, Huntington Beach, Calif.; 888/339-1774, ext. 11; marilyn@lighthousetravel.net.*

#### Ed Phillips ✓

Phillips has been drawn to the islands' natural beauty, friendly locals, rich culture, and culinary scene since his first trip, as a 12-year-old. He knows his way around both the luxury resorts (Trump's Waikiki property is a recent favorite) and active outdoor adventures, including hiking the lush trails of Oahu—all of which he will have trekked by the end of this year.

*Top tip* Tantalus Mountain Trail ("the hill" to locals), just outside of downtown Waikiki, Oahu, is often overlooked. You're likely to encounter residents—sometimes coming back from wild-boar hunts with game in tow—as you hike through rain forests to city lookouts and waterfalls.

*Years as agent* 25.

*Other specialty* Alaska. *Frosch Travel, Burlingame, Calif.; 800/962-2030; trvaler@gmail.com.*

### NAPA VALLEY

#### Michelle Murré

Murré frequently makes the easy drive from San Francisco to evaluate new hotels, restaurants, and experiences in the country's preeminent wine region. While she often directs clients to Napa's nature trails and other outdoor activities, she also maintains a little black book packed with contacts at exclusive wineries, many not open to the public. On her itineraries, the restaurant suggestions read like mini-reviews, with notes on design, food, and wine lists.

*Excited about* The refreshed Hotel Yountville, which has 80 large yet cozy rooms in stone-walled cottages, complete with fireplaces and complimentary bicycles.

*Years as agent* 10.

*Other specialty* Italy.

*Azurine, San Francisco; 415/796-3869; michelle@azurinetravel.com.*

### NEW YORK

#### Lia Batkin ★

Batkin and her partner, Seth Kaplan, created the travel and lifestyle firm In the Know Experiences to cater to a younger set of savvy travelers who crave insider knowledge and local connections. In Batkin's hometown of New York City, that means access to coveted restaurant reservations, a shopping day with a personal stylist, and tickets to sold-out events in all five boroughs.

*New favorite* Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons opened a Murray Hill outpost of her London store Dover Street Market, where pieces by Yves Saint Laurent and Alaïa mingle with those by emerging designers. "Warning: there is a lot of eye candy and it requires a decent amount of time to take it all in," she says.

*Years as agent* 8.

*Other specialty* Luxury travel.

*In the Know Experiences, New York City; 212/776-1784; lia@intheknowexperiences.com.*

### PACIFIC NORTHWEST

#### Sheri Doyle ★

Focusing on travel to Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, and northern California for more than 20 years, Doyle has built a network of plugged-in insiders throughout the region who keep her up to date on new inns and activities. A Seattle resident, she's negotiated preferred hotel rates in the area's major cities. Her detailed, 20-plus page itineraries include experiences such as private dinners and wine tastings in the Willamette Valley.

*Excited about* On Lummi, one of Washington's San Juan Islands, the once-sleepy Willows Inn has become

a dining destination thanks to chef Blaine Wetzel, who trained at Noma, in Copenhagen.

*Years as agent* 23.

*Other specialty* Canadian Rockies.

*Pacific Northwest Journeys,*

*Seattle; 800/935-9730;*

*info@pnwjournays.com.*

### WESTERN U.S.

#### Harold Jenkins

"In many ways, it's more difficult to plan a trip to Montana than to Moscow," says Jenkins, who knows the rugged West's secrets thanks to a childhood spent exploring its backcountry and national parks. He travels through the Rockies and beyond at least four times a year, testing out private fishing rivers, road-trip routes, and ski mountains and meeting knowledgeable guides.

*Insider clout* As a birthday present from a husband to his ski-enthusiast wife, Jenkins arranged a surprise visit from legendary Olympic gold medalist Stein Eriksen at the top of a lift at Utah's Deer Valley resort. Eriksen joined them on a run down the mountain.

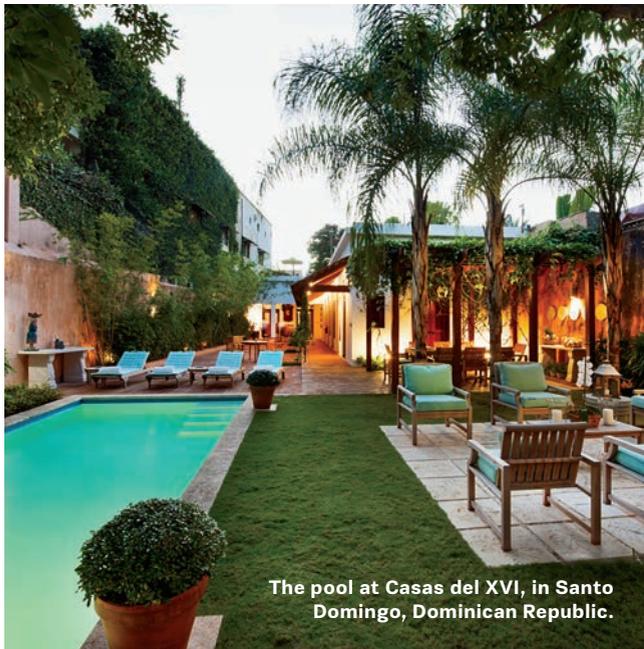
*Years as agent* 26.

*Other specialty* Skiing.

*American Express Corporate Vacations, Lake Forest, Ill.;*

*615/714-9917;*

*harold.jenkins@corpvacations.com.*



The pool at Casas del XVI, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

## CARIBBEAN

### Margie Hand

An avid scuba diver, Hand fell in love with the Caribbean on her honeymoon 20 years ago. She's traveled to 14 islands in the past five years, including Jamaica, Aruba, Curaçao, and Grand Cayman, where she recently discovered a company that offers private sailing lessons. Hand can secure the little perks (room upgrades; late checkouts; spa credits) that make a getaway even more memorable.

*Excited about* Fresh energy in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

There are new shops and restaurants, plus hotels such as Casas del XVI, a collection of restored colonial houses. With direct flights from JFK and a new highway linking the city to Punta Cana, Santa Domingo is increasingly accessible.

*Years as agent* 20.

*Other specialty* Destination weddings.

*Andavo Travel, Birmingham, Ala.; 888/234-0046; margie.hand@andavotravel.com.*

### Janet McLaughlin

When it comes to hotel managers, chefs, gallery owners, and private yacht charters, McLaughlin has friends in the right places. To wit: she once booked clients into a resort on St. Bart's that was listed everywhere as sold out. She can also arrange sought-after restaurant reservations

on St. Maarten, bonefishing expeditions in the Bahamas, and private diving trips on Curaçao.

*New favorite* Rosewood at Baha Mar, a British-colonial-style resort on Cable Beach in the Bahamas.

Scheduled to open in December, it will have an 18-hole, Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course.

*Years as agent* 25.

*Other specialty* Italy.

*Provident Travel, Cincinnati; 513/533-7867; jmclaughlin@providenttravel.com.*

### Liz Sadie Sutton ✓

The president of Alabama World Travel/Sutton & Associates, Sutton visits new properties with an extensive checklist in hand, placing an emphasis on service wherever she goes. She only recommends places that she considers "genuine and authentic," and often travels to see top clients for in-person planning meetings.

*Special booking* For a big group trip at the Secrets Maroma Beach Riviera Cancun, Sutton's employees saw the hotel in advance to pick the best suites and educate hotel staff on guests' names and food preferences.

*Years as agent* 37.

*Other specialty* Cruises.

*Alabama World Travel/Sutton & Associates, Montgomery, Ala.; 334/260-2482; liz@awtinc.com.*

## MEXICO & CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA

ARGENTINA, CHILE, AND URUGUAY

### Maita Barrenechea

*See Super-Agents.*

ARGENTINA AND CHILE

### Jordan Harvey

Harvey and his wife were living on a dairy farm in Patagonia when they founded Knowmad Adventures, and their friends—artists, chefs, architects, and photographers—became their network of insider contacts. The end result? Many of the vineyards, haciendas, and estates available to their clients aren't typically accessible to the public.

*Special booking* An interactive dinner with chef Patricio Cáceres Pérez, of Motemei restaurant, in Santiago, Chile, in his personal kitchen studio. Travelers will learn to cook with *mote*, a regional wheat variety that's boiled and removed from its husk.

*Years as agent* 5.

*Other specialty* Peru.

*Knowmad Adventures, Minneapolis; 877/616-8747; jordan@knowmadadventures.com.*

BRAZIL

### Martin Frankenberg

What sets this São Paulo resident—and his travel company, Matueté—apart from the competition? His

unmatched knowledge. No expense is spared when inspecting hotels and experiences, and nothing (guides, drivers, etc.) is outsourced to local operators. Frankenberg can secure VIP tickets to Carnival's Sambodrome stadium events—but he'll also recommend exploring Brazil's lesser-known corners, including Lençóis Maranhenses National Park, in the northeast.

*New favorite* The *Tamarind*, a 105-foot classic yacht with beautifully refurbished interiors. It sails along the coastline south of Rio de Janeiro on three- to seven-night itineraries.

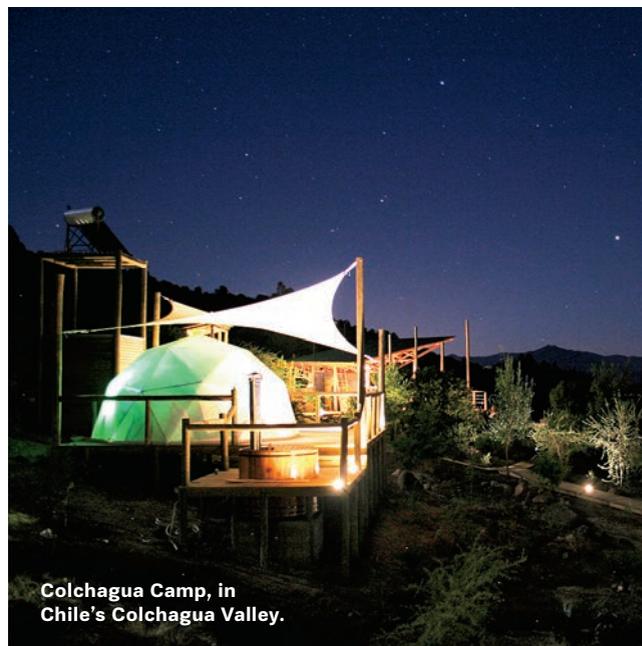
*Years as agent* 14.

*Matueté, São Paulo, Brazil; 866/709-5952; martin@matuete.com.*

### Paul Irvine

After a 10-day trip exploring Brazil's remote regions, Irvine turned down a finance job and moved to Rio, where he cofounded Dehouche. The British expat values smaller, design-forward properties with top-notch wine cellars over large chain brands, and refrains from sending clients to hotels when he knows the manager will be away. When arranging itineraries, Irvine is especially attentive to the weather, which can vary widely from region to region.

*Insider clout* One of Irvine's soccer-fan clients had access to



Colchagua Camp, in Chile's Colchagua Valley.

every game during the 2014 World Cup, and was shuttled between stadiums by private jet. Irvine also arranged drumming lessons with a top samba school and a meeting with a celebrity Brazilian soccer player. *Years as agent* 11. *Other specialty* Argentina. *Dehouche, Rio de Janeiro; 800/690-6899; paul.irvine@dehouche.com.*

#### CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

##### **Emmanuel Burgio**

Burgio worked in finance before creating his travel company, Blue Paralel, which specializes in top-of-the-line bespoke getaways that combine luxury and adventure. He can arrange both solo ice treks through Argentina's Perito Moreno glacier and family-friendly polo lessons on a private estancia—all with 24/7 concierge service. The company also has a collection of private villas, staffed by members of Burgio's team. *Special booking* Burgio coordinated a wine tasting in the private cellar of Cassis restaurant, located in San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina, with the owner, Ernesto Wolf. *Years as agent* 12. *Other specialty* Mediterranean. *Blue Paralel, Potomac, Md.; 800/256-5307; emmanuel@blueparalel.com.*

#### CHILE

##### **Brian Pearson** ★

There's little the Santiago-based Pearson hasn't experienced when it comes to outdoor adventures in Chile. He's cycled thousands of miles to develop bike itineraries, personally testing all of the stops along the way (picnic lunches in peach orchards; wine tastings in private vineyards). He's also the general manager of Ski Arpa, an exclusive snowcat ski mountain in the Andes that's open June through September. *Excited about* Colchagua Camp, a little-known glamping lodge outside of Santa Cruz in the heart of a Chilean wine valley. Dome-shaped tents have private terraces with hot tubs and are surrounded by lemon groves. *Years as agent* 11. *Other specialties* Argentina and Uruguay. *Santiago Adventures, Santiago, Chile; 56-2/2244-2750; bpearson@santiagoadventures.com.*

#### GALÁPAGOS

##### **Brian Morgan**

Due to constantly changing park regulations, the Galápagos can be a difficult destination to navigate—but Morgan and his staff of 19 do it

with ease, arranging everything from scuba diving to boat transfers between islands. He has in-depth knowledge of the region's 50-plus small ships and luxury cruises, including each vessel's comfort level, activity options, and routes. *Excited about* Increasingly popular land excursions, such as the safari-like Floreana Lava Lodge, on Floreana island south of Puerto Ayora. The eco-friendly property offers stand-up paddleboarding and kayaking. *Years as agent* 15. *Other specialty* Peru. *Adventure Life, Missoula, Mont.; 800/344-6118; brian.morgan@adventurelife.com.*

#### MEXICO

##### **Zachary Rabinor**

The Puerto Vallarta-based founder of Journey Mexico worked his way up the industry ladder—he's been a tour leader, driver, guide, and logistician—which gives him an inside perspective on the planning process. He collaborates with the country's best hotels on everything from wellness-focused Tulum getaways to culture-filled stays in San Miguel de Allende. And his coordinators personally check in with clients at least three times per trip. *Insider clout* Rabinor planned a 10-day trip via private jet along the Riviera Maya to Chiapas, Comala, and Punta Mita. The group stopped at archaeological sites, participated in shamanistic rituals, and attended a privately organized *charreada* (Mexican rodeo). *Years as agent* 20. *Other specialty* Central America. *Journey Mexico, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico; 800/513-1587; zach@journeymexico.com.*

#### PERU AND BOLIVIA

##### **Marisol Mosquera**

A former investment banker, Lima-based Mosquera left London to become a travel advisor in her native country of Peru. She uses her bicultural background to her advantage, focusing on authentic, local experiences: cooking classes in a chef's home, a homestay on the shores of Lake Titicaca, or guided fly-fishing excursions in a remote lagoon in the Peruvian Andes. *New favorite* Hotel B, in Barranco, is one of Lima's most exciting openings in years. Set in a Belle Époque mansion, the 17 rooms have white marble bathrooms, vintage armoires, and original art. *Years as agent* 17. *Other specialty* Galápagos. *Aracari Travel, Lima, Peru; 51-1/651-2424; marisol@aracari.com.*

#### SOUTH AMERICA

##### **Barkley Hickox** ★

Hickox's parents were in the luxury hotel business, and a childhood spent all over the world easily translated into a career in the travel industry. She's skilled at discovering off-the-radar experiences, such as tasting maté in Argentina, visiting an NGO-sponsored favela in Rio, and meeting a famous sculptor in his Uruguay studio. Indagare Travel uses a membership-based model, with clients paying an annual retainer ranging from \$350 to \$10,000 per year. *Top tip* For travelers who want to stay off the tourist track in Rio, Mama Ruisa is a funky bed-and-breakfast in the bohemian Santa Teresa neighborhood. *Years as agent* 4. *Other specialty* Italy. *Indagare Travel, New York City; 212/988-2611; barkleyh@indagare.com.*

##### **Beth Jenkins**

At 27, Jenkins is especially in tune with the planning styles of younger travelers, and is a great fit for someone using a specialist for the first time. Over the past few years, she's made it a priority to explore lesser-known destinations, including Roatán, in Honduras, and Peru's Colca Valley—though she is also adept at arranging trips to the classics (Iguazú Falls; Machu Picchu). *Special booking* Jenkins organized a pisco tour in Lima, including bars that ranged from traditional (La Calesa, for some of the city's best pisco sours) to trendy (Malabar, which uses the liquor in creative ways.) *Years as agent* 5. *Other specialty* Honeymoons. *McCabe World Travel, McLean, Va.; 703/762-5048; beth@mccabeworld.com.*

##### **Eric Sheets**

A part-time Quito resident, Sheets prefers experiences that put a new spin on a destination. He may suggest stays in a waterfront villa staffed with chefs and naturalist guides on the Galápagos' Santa Cruz, boat trips to sandy beaches along the Amazon, or guided hikes through Chapada Diamantina National Park—"like the Grand Canyon only covered in lush greenery"—in Bahia, Brazil. *New favorite* Pikaia Lodge, an alternative to the traditional Galápagos getaway. With 14 rooms (and more in the works) and its own private yacht and boat, it offers a hybrid land-and-sea experience. The resort aims to be carbon neutral by 2017, utilizing solar and other

alternative energy sources. *Years as agent* 18. *Other specialties* Chile and Argentina. *Latin Excursions, Aventura, Fla.; 305/356-8488, ext. 100; eric@latinexcursions.com.*

#### SOUTH AMERICAN FOOD & WINE

##### **Liz Caskey**

A trained sommelier and cookbook author, Caskey lives in Santiago with her Chilean husband and business partner. Together, they keep up with the region's booming food scene, and her clients reap the benefits: Caskey can arrange olive-oil tastings in Colchagua, score coveted restaurant reservations in Buenos Aires and Lima, and set up private tours of Mendoza vineyards. *New favorite* Santiago's Restaurante Peumayen. "The chefs use refined techniques, but the focus is on generations-old cuisines that are traditional to native communities such as the Mapuche and Aymara." *Years as agent* 9. *Other specialty* Adventure. *Liz Caskey Culinary & Wine Experiences, Santiago, Chile; 904/687-0340; liz@lizcaskey.com.*



Anabezi Luxury Tented Camp, in Zambezi National Park, Zambia.

## AFRICA & THE MIDDLE EAST

### AFRICA

#### Sandy Cunningham

Cunningham, who was raised in both Zimbabwe and South Africa, has worked on both sides of the safari industry: she ran camps in Kenya with her husband for six years before settling in the U.S. to plan bespoke journeys. She takes the time to discuss the importance of conservation with clients, and can help them experience it on, for example, a private rhino-tracking safari that spans three camps in South Africa.

*Special booking* In Kenya's Northern Frontier, Cunningham can arrange a safari with a leading IMAX documentary filmmaker and top East African conservationists, who will help travelers craft their own short films on endangered wildlife. *Years as agent* 19.

*Other specialties* Luxury and family travel. *Outside Go, Santa Fe, N. Mex.;* 888/995-0909; [sandy@outsidego.com](mailto:sandy@outsidego.com).

#### Lisa Lindblad

See *Super-Agents*.

#### Michael Lorentz ★

Lorentz—the cofounder and CEO of Passage to Africa and cofounder of Safarious.com (a social networking site for safari-goers)—is best known for pioneering off-the-grid experiences. He may push you

outside of your comfort zone, but the payoff can include exploring the little-known Zakouma National Park in Chad or accessing rarely seen tribal ceremonies in Ethiopia's Omo River Valley.

*New favorite* In Cape Town, the Ellerman House's Villa Two, a sophisticated three-bedroom with private terraces, an infinity pool, and a social vibe thanks to the large entertaining area overlooking the water. The property also has a new wine gallery with over 7,500 South African bottles.

*Years as agent* 29. *Passage to Africa, Cape Town;* 27-82/895-8527; [ml@passagetoafrica.com](http://ml@passagetoafrica.com).

#### Dana Welch

A former trekking guide in Nepal and lodge manager in Zambia, Welch is the go-to advisor for adventure-minded travelers. Her specialty is wildlife safaris, and she partners with a very select group of operators and guides. Recently, she's planned flying safaris across Namibia, lodge-hopping tours in Botswana, and driving itineraries through Mozambique.

*Special booking* When a client requested close encounters with wildlife in southern Africa, Welch set up an opportunity to assist a veterinary team in a rhino-tracking project at Phinda Private Game Reserve, in South Africa.

*Years as agent* 22. *Other specialty* Adventure travel. *The Travel Society, Denver;* 303/563-6225; [dana@travelsociety.com](mailto:dana@travelsociety.com).

BOTSWANA, ZIMBABWE, AND ZAMBIA

#### Craig Beal

Beal's South African-born mother founded Travel Beyond, taking him on his first safari at age four. He's been traveling to Botswana and Zimbabwe for more than 30 years, and when he isn't in Africa—staying at new lodges and meeting top guides—he's talking about it at conferences as a cofounder of Safari Professionals of America or in online forums such as TripAdvisor and FlyerTalk.

*Discovery* The seven-year-old Lion Camp, located in a remote corner of Zambia's Luangwa National Park, known for its walking safaris and views. Thatch-and-canvas chalets overlook an oxbow lagoon and open plain, ideal for wildlife spotting.

*Years as agent* 9. *Other specialties* South Africa. *Travel Beyond, Wayzata, Minn.;* 800/876-3131; [craigh@travelbeyond.com](http://craigh@travelbeyond.com).

EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

#### Dan Achber

Achber, whose father is South African, spent a few years in Botswana and Zimbabwe, where he managed three safari lodges and had a direct hand in everything from accounting and staffing to customer service. His experience in the bush—and the fact that he's personally vetted nearly 100 safari camps—means he knows the difference between a good camp and a great one.

*Excited about* Ethiopia, for its compelling mix of wildlife and culture. "Where else can you hang out with gelada baboons in the Simien Mountains while taking in the confluence of ancient Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and native African beliefs?" he says.

*Years as agent* 6. *Trufflepig, Toronto;* 416/628-1272; [dan@trufflepig.com](http://dan@trufflepig.com).

#### Elizabeth Gordon ★

The 32-year-old Gordon—who was born in Kenya and worked for Wilderness Safaris in Namibia—understands the particular travel demands of younger clients, who are time-crunched, adventurous, and independent-minded. She visits Africa up to three times a year to stay on top of lodge openings, changes in management, and more.

*Top tip* The best end to an East African safari: the beaches of northern Mozambique. Top

private-island properties include the nine-villa Azura Quilalea and Vamizi, where casitas have carved lattice windows.

*Years as agent* 6. *Extraordinary Journeys, New York City;* 800/403-6012; [elizabeth@ejafrika.com](mailto:elizabeth@ejafrika.com).

#### Tim Lapage

Lapage—who speaks Swahili, French, and Spanish—focuses on off-the-beaten-path safaris for discerning travelers, booking lodges that promote local economic growth and sustainable development whenever possible. His approach is so hands-on that he spends three months a year in Africa, sometimes even flying clients from camp to camp in his own bush plane.

*New favorite* Richard Branson's Mahali Mzuri lodge, in the Masai Mara region of Kenya. Each of the 12 futuristic-looking tents has its own large deck, a perfect vantage point from which to spot animals, including cheetahs, lions, and elephants.

*Years as agent* 33. *Other specialties* Peru and the Galápagos. *Safari Experts, Park City, Utah;* 435/649-4655; [safari@safariexperts.com](mailto:safari@safariexperts.com).

#### Mark William Nolting

Nolting wrote the book on African safaris—literally. The author of *Africa's Top Wildlife Countries*, he has in-depth knowledge and strong relationships with guides and lodge owners. And he takes client feedback (from more than 10,000 travelers and counting) very seriously, using it to improve every new itinerary.

*Special booking* For a family of seven, Nolting planned a safari by private jet that included stays at Singita Ebony Lodge, near Kruger National Park; Victoria Falls; Vumbura Plains, in the Okavango Delta; and the Motse, a lodge in South Africa's Tswalu Game Reserve.

*Years as agent* 28. *Other specialties* Madagascar and the Seychelles. *Africa Adventure Company, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.;* 800/882-9453; [safari@africanadventure.com](http://safari@africanadventure.com).

#### Kent Redding ★

Redding was a camp manager and safari guide in Tanzania before moving to Denver to launch Africa Adventure Consultants. He's visited hundreds of top safari destinations and has key relationships with operators and camps. Redding prides himself on keeping value in mind when booking everything from whale-watching via a plane off Hermanus, South Africa, to

hot-air-balloon rides over the Serengeti.

*Special booking* For a group that requested a wildlife-viewing trip with a wellness twist, Redding created a Tanzanian itinerary compete with sunrise yoga classes, twice-daily game drives, spa treatments, and sundowners in the bush.

*Years as agent* 13.  
*Africa Adventure Consultants*,  
Denver; 866/778-1089;  
kent@adventuresinafrica.com.

### Jackie Rush

Rush, who often leads trips herself, has traveled throughout the continent for more than 38 years, building strong and lasting connections with lodge owners and private guides. She promotes camps and reserves that are at the forefront of efforts to save elephants and rhinos from poaching. *Excited about* The Elephant Watch Camp, located on the banks of Kenya's Ewaso Nyiro River. The eco-friendly property is solar-powered and creates zero waste; its Italian-African restaurant uses food grown on site.

*Years as agent* 38.  
*Other specialty* Jordan.  
*Frosch*, Washington, D.C.; 800/296-0071; jackie.rush@frosch.com.

### Sunit Sanghrajka

This fourth-generation Kenyan designs safaris that showcase sustainable tourism. A founding member of Safari Professionals of America, he seeks out camps and lodges—from Rubondo Island Camp in Tanzania to Wilderness Safaris' Mombo Camp in Botswana's Okavango Delta—that focus on wildlife conservation and deliver excellent game viewing. His connections give him an inside track to VIP experiences.

*Special booking* Sanghrajka can set up hikes through the chimpanzee habitats of Tanzania's Mahale Mountains National Park with a researcher as your guide.  
*Years as agent* 21.  
*Alluring Africa*,  
Winter Park, Fla.; 800/510-6059;  
sunit@alluringafrica.com.

### EGYPT

#### Malaka Hilton

Hilton, whose father was born in Egypt, has an extensive network of friends and family throughout the country, which translates into insider experiences such as meals in local homes, golf at exclusive courses, and private yacht rentals. She once organized a dinner at the foot of the Pyramids.

*Insider clout* Hilton can plan a trip with a personal shopper to specialty

shops such as Tawfik, her preferred jeweler in Cairo, where artisans will design custom pieces for clients.

*Years as agent* 20.  
*Other specialties* Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.  
*Admiral Travel International*,  
Sarasota, Fla.; 888/722-3401;  
malaka@admiraltravel.com.

### FAMILY SAFARIS

#### Leora Rothschild ★

Rothschild, a South Africa native, has experienced everything that she plans for her clients: canoeing with her children in Zambia's Lower Zambezi; taking family to Kenya's Mara River crossing during the great migration; and trekking to see gorillas in Rwanda. She can also set up family-friendly volunteering opportunities in southern Africa. *Discovery* Cottar's 1920s Safari Camp, located in a private conservancy adjacent to the Masai Mara in Kenya, has a warrior experience for children. Led by a Masai elder, kids learn to make a fire, throw a spear, and use a bow and arrow.

*Years as agent* 23.  
*Other specialty* Honeymoon safaris.  
*Rothschild Safaris*,  
Denver; 800/405-9463;  
leora@rothschildsafaris.com.

### ISRAEL

#### Rachel Epstein

Epstein, who travels to Israel about five times a year, knows the country from every angle: adventure, cultural, faith-based, and political. She leads many of her own trips, and has planned bar- and bat mitzvah celebrations, private masses and baptisms, wedding-vow renewals, and history-focused vacations.

*Excited about* The 19th-century Jerusalem train station has been completely refurbished and is now home to seven restaurants, farmers' markets, and an art gallery.  
*Years as agent* 32.  
*Other specialties* Spain and group travel.  
*Frosch*, New York City; 800/866-1623;  
rachel.epstein@frosch.com.

### KENYA AND TANZANIA

#### Volker Altwater

The self-described safari addict visits Africa twice a year, and continuously nurtures his passion for community-based conservancies. Altwater is a champion of smaller-scale tented camps that focus on land and wildlife preservation. *Excited about* Zimbabwe beyond Victoria Falls. The country has one of the highest densities of ancient rock art in southern Africa; you can see San rock paintings—not to mention black and white rhinos—in

Matobo National Park. Head to the Matopos Hills for a chance to spot the rare black eagle.

*Years as agent* 28.  
*Other specialty* South Africa.  
*Big Five Tours & Expeditions*,  
Stuart, Fla.; 800/345-2445;  
volker@bigfive.com.

### MIDDLE EAST

#### Jean Newman Glock

After earning a master's in foreign service from Georgetown University, Glock was an international oil consultant and spent 17 years with Smithsonian Journeys. She even worked on a yearlong initiative with the U.S. Department of State and Chamber of Commerce to promote tourism to North Africa. Glock's little black book of archaeologists, government officials, and cultural leaders opens doors for her clients. *Insider clout* Glock set up a tour of an active archaeological dig at a Byzantine church in Petra, Jordan, along with a visit to the American Council of Oriental Research headquarters to see sixth-century scrolls rarely shown to the public.  
*Years as agent* 3.  
*JNG Worldwide*, Washington, D.C.; 703/314-9595; jean@jngworldwide.com.

### MOROCCO

#### Michael Diamond

With a keen interest in cultural and experiential travel, Diamond plans everything from cooking classes in a Fez *riad* to hikes and horseback rides through the country's scenic southern deserts. One special touch: all of his clients are given cell phones during the trip so they can call guides, drivers, and the Marrakesh office of his company at any time.

*Excited about* Increased interest in family travel to Morocco. Diamond sets up hands-on activities such as drum-making workshops, caftan design, and calligraphy lessons.  
*Years as agent* 13.  
*Other specialty* Turkey.  
*Heritage Tours Private Travel*,  
New York City; 800/378-4555;  
michael@htprivatetravel.com.

### NAMIBIA

#### Chris Liebenberg ★

A Namibian national parks contractor turned travel advisor, Liebenberg has lived in every major destination in Namibia and driven almost every road (most recently with his mother) to test self-guided safari options. He has also worked on anti-rhino-poaching missions and elephant and lion conservation projects in Etosha National Park. *New favorite* Wilderness Safaris' Hoanib Camp, which debuted in

August. The eight-tent property opens up a new segment of the Skeleton Coast where travelers can see lions, long-horned gemsboks, and even South Atlantic seal colonies.

*Years as agent* 5.  
*Other specialty* Botswana.  
*Piper & Heath Travel*,  
San Diego; 888/897-2634;  
chris@piperandheath.com.

### SOUTH AFRICA

#### Tamsyn Fricker ★

Fricker approaches trip planning as an art form—one that involves learning about her clients' concerns, desires, and interests before even discussing the destination. The keyed-in University of South Africa graduate has strong connections with travel suppliers (drivers, lodge owners, guides, and porters), and she also frequently taps into her network of plugged-in locals. In case of an emergency, there is a South Africa-based team to provide round-the-clock support—and Fricker herself is also available 24/7. *Excited about* SecretEats, a series of underground pop-up dinners and other events in Cape Town. "Travelers have the opportunity to dine with Capetonians."

*Years as agent* 6.  
*Other specialty* Southern Africa.  
*Travel Artistry Africa*,  
Houston; 281/974-3662;  
tamsyn@travelartistryafrica.com.

### SOUTHERN AFRICA

#### Cherri Briggs

Briggs has houses in Zambia and Botswana, and spends six to nine months a year traveling the continent, including Chad, Congo, Kenya, and beyond. This legwork allows her to bypass destination-management companies and book every hotel, lodge, transfer, guide, and driver personally, which often reduces the overall cost. Briggs and her husband have also founded a slew of community development projects in Zambia, including solar-powered irrigation systems. *New favorite* Anabezi Luxury Tented Camp, located in the most remote part of the Lower Zambezi National Park, in Zambia. "It affords a great level of comfort in the middle of absolutely nowhere," she says. "It is in the heart of an immense, untouched wilderness area with a particular abundance of leopard."  
*Years as agent* 20.  
*Other specialties* The Seychelles and Indian Ocean islands.  
*Explore, Inc.*, Steamboat Springs, Colo.; 888/596-6377; cherri@exploreafrika.net.

## Julian Harrison

Born and raised in South Africa, this former game ranger and co-author of *Fodor's African Safari* knows when to visit certain destinations to maximize wildlife viewing, keeping factors such as rain, migratory patterns, and vegetation in mind. Over the past few years, Harrison—who can arrange home visits with scientists and conservationists—has boated the Okavango Delta, gone gorilla trekking in Congo, canoed the Zambezi River, and fished in Malawi.

*New favorite* The intimate, three-tent Little Tubu Tree Camp, in the Okavango Delta. Guests can explore via open safari vehicles as well as *mokoros* (dugout canoes).

*Years as agent* 28.

*Other specialties* East and central Africa.

*Premier Tours, Philadelphia; 800/545-1910; julianh@premiertours.com.*

## Teresa Sullivan ★

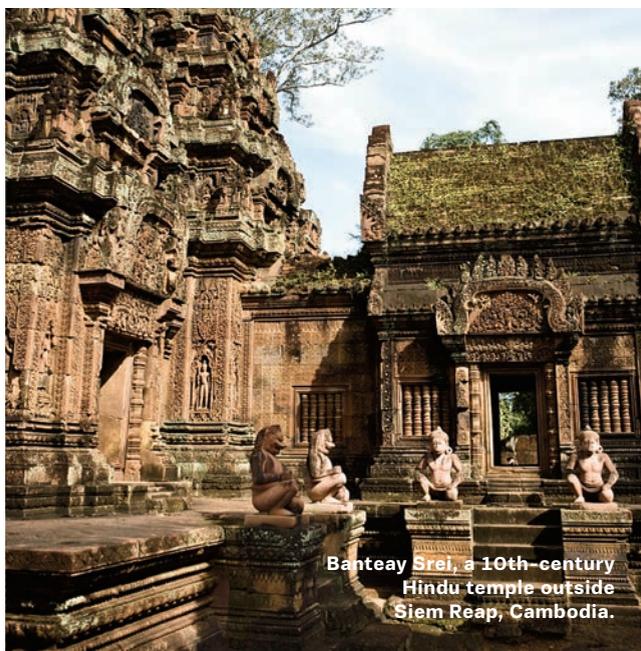
Since founding Mango African Safaris 15 years ago with her business partner Casey Hermansen, Sullivan has intensively vetted each experience they offer, spending weeks at a time on the ground. They have hitchhiked, taken trains, ridden camels, horses, and elephants, always seeking out what's around the next corner. Sullivan pays particular attention to the pacing of a trip, limiting one- and two-night stays, and is adept at booking travel during the more affordable green season.

*Insider clout* Conservation is a passion of Sullivan's, and she has close relationships with local organizations. Her clients have released cheetahs back into the wild, gone on game counts with the Cheetah Conservation Fund, and spent time with Map Ives of the Botswana Rhino Project.

*Years as agent* 15.

*Other specialties* East Africa and Indian Ocean islands.

*Mango African Safaris, Portland, Ore.; 888/406-2646; info@mangosafari.com.*



Banteay Srei, a 10th-century Hindu temple outside Siem Reap, Cambodia.

# ASIA

## BURMA

### Rebecca Mazzaro

Mazzaro has traveled extensively through Burma, seeking out its secluded corners and developing relationships with managers at top hotels. She can set up a hot-air-balloon ride over Mandalay, a guided hike around Inle Lake, or a biking trip through the scenic Shan state. *Excited about* Sanctuary Retreats river cruises on the new *Sanctuary Ananda*, launching in November with Bagan-to-Mandalay itineraries through tribal regions.

*Years as agent* 16.

*Other specialty* India.

*Asia Transpacific Journeys, Boulder, Colo.; 800/642-2742; rebecca@asiatranspacific.com.*

## CAMBODIA

### Andy Booth ★

After realizing that Cambodians were only marginally benefiting from the travel industry, British-born Booth moved to Siem Reap to found ABOUTAsia, which creates bespoke trips, with all profits going to support local schools. His specialty is tailoring itineraries to avoid crowds at the temples of Angkor and hiring extremely knowledgeable, English-speaking guides.

*Insider clout* Booth can arrange private visits to a live archaeological

dig, where you can meet the scholar running the program.

*Years as agent* 9.

*ABOUTAsia Travel, Siem Reap, Cambodia; 855-12/338-872; a.booth@aboutasiatravel.com.*

## CHINA

### Stan Godwyn

Godwyn, who speaks Mandarin, has lived in Shanxi province and has a master's in anthropology with a focus on Chinese archaeology. He nimbly manages common hiccups such as unannounced flight changes and gridlocked traffic in Beijing. Regular visits are essential, he says, since the country is changing so rapidly.

*Excited about* The museum at the Sanxingdui ruins in Chengdu, dedicated to Sichuan's little-known Bronze Age culture. The well-preserved masks and statues are unlike any other artifacts in China.

*Years as agent* 20.

*Other specialty* Southeast Asia. *TravelStore, Sacramento, Calif.; 916/830-5511; stan.g@travelstore.com.*

### Guy Rubin

*See Super-Agents.*

## CHINA AND TIBET

### Mei Zhang

The Beijing-based Zhang formed WildChina with a mission to take

travelers off the beaten path, showing the other side of Shanghai and Beijing and introducing them to destinations such as Tengchong and Baoshan, in her native Yunnan region.

*Excited about* New ways to enjoy Dali, Yunnan. Stay in the 18-room Windoo Resort, on the edge of Er Hai Lake. Bike around the water on a recently added ring road with Cangshan Mountain views.

*Years as agent* 14.

*Other specialties* Southeast Asia and North Korea.

*WildChina, Beijing; 888/902-8808; mei.zhang@wildchina.com.*

## HONG KONG

### Laura Woo

Raised in Hong Kong, Woo often returns to her hometown to uncover shops, restaurants, and hotels. She's particularly adept at advising travelers on transportation and knows the ins and outs of the city's ferries, trains, funiculars, and buses. *New favorite* The Auberge Discovery Bay hotel. There's free Wi-Fi, a restaurant with South China Sea views, a spa and pool, and an activity center that can arrange excursions. Oceanfront rooms have floor-to-ceiling windows.

*Years as agent* 32.

*Other specialties* Hawaii and Macao. *West University Travel, Houston; 800/256-0640; woo@hal-pc.org.*

## INDIA

### Jonny Bealby

This former travel journalist is a pro at pairing India's most popular destinations—Agra, Jaipur, Delhi, and Mumbai—with less-frequented rural areas, his point of passion. His knowledge of Central Asian—influenced Leh, in the Indus Valley, and the Nubra Valley (dotted with ruined palaces) is unparalleled. *Insider clout* Bealby planned a 50th birthday party in Rajasthan that included fire breathers, snake charmers, and a live band that arrived by elephant.

*Years as agent* 12.

*Other specialty* Central Asia. *Wild Frontiers, London; 44-20/7736-3968; jonny@wildfrontiers.co.uk.*

### Pallavi Shah

*See Super-Agents.*

## INDIA AND SRI LANKA

### Carole A. Cambata

The president of Greaves Tours earns her accolades by building hassle-free trips that don't lose sight of the Indian Subcontinent's rich cultural layers. One day, her clients might head out on a fearless street-food tour in Hyderabad; the

next, they're playing elephant polo in Jaipur. She's skilled at planning wellness trips and exotic honeymoons.  
*New favorite* The safari-style Jawai Leopard Camp, outside Udaipur, for tours of leopards' native habitat. The eight tents are comfortable and stylish—and off the grid.  
*Years as agent* 33.  
*Other specialty* Bhutan.  
*Greaves Tours, Highland Park, Ill.; 800/318-7801; ccambata@greavestvl.com.*

**Ashish Sanghrajka**  
 Sanghrajka, who grew up visiting family in India every year, loves introducing clients to parts of the country that travelers don't often see. His tailor-made itineraries include stays at small boutique hotels on the outskirts of Jodhpur.  
*Top tip* Rather than the standard half-day tour, spend some extra time in Mysore, in South India, known for its grand temples and palaces. Sanghrajka can set up walking or biking excursions on roads that are too narrow for cars.  
*Years as agent* 13.  
*Other specialty* Kenya.  
*Big Five Tours & Expeditions, Stuart, Fla.; 888/565-6112; ashish@bigfive.com.*

INDONESIA  
**Jarrold Hobson**  
 Known as "the Indonesia guy" to his colleagues, Hobson is the go-to advisor for trips to one of the country's 17,508 islands, especially Bali. He'll walk you through the complex geography and wildlife highlights, as well as lead you to Ubud's best restaurants. He can also arrange a visit to a school he helped found or a trek to remote villages.  
*Discovery* It's hard to find secluded places in Bali, which is one reason Hobson loves Paradise by the Sea, an exclusive, privately staffed villa steps away from a black-sand Indian Ocean beach.  
*Years as agent* 19.  
*Other specialty* Southeast Asia.  
*Asia Transpacific Journeys, Boulder, Colo.; 800/642-2742; jarrod@asiatranspacific.com.*

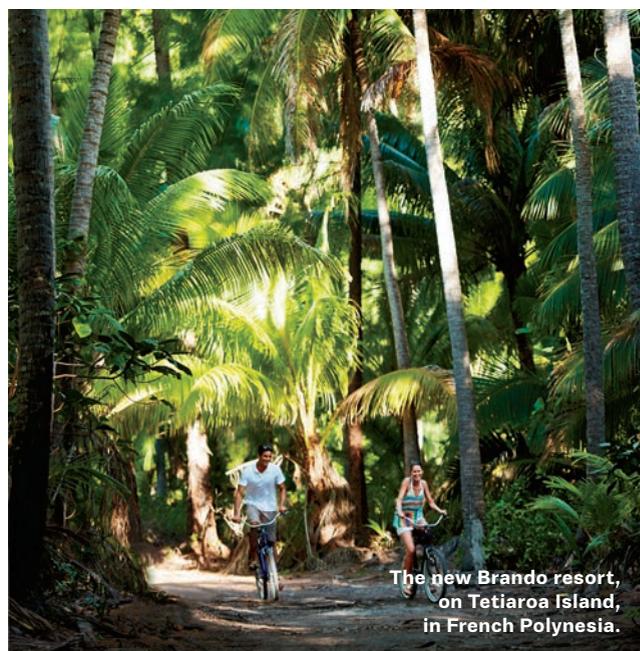
JAPAN  
**Noriko Townsend**  
 At least two trips a year allow Townsend, an Aomori native, to explore both Japan's popular cities and small villages. She's always finding new hotels and traditional *ryokans*, most recently the Aomoriya *ryokan*, in Misawa.  
*Special booking* To make a solo female traveler feel at home on a 30-day trip, Townsend arranged meet-and-greets at airports and hotels. (At the Keio Plaza Hotel, the

GM presented her with an origami card signed by the entire staff.) She also planned a private sushi-making class at the Tsukiji Fish Market.  
*Years as agent* 19.  
*Other specialty* Southeast Asia.  
*Altour American Express Travel/Japan In Style, Fort Collins, Colo.; 877/737-1647; noriko.townsend@altour.com.*

**Duff Trimble**  
 In an effort to introduce guests to authentic traditions in what he calls the "lost Japan," Trimble invests considerable time and resources on scouting trips to areas that foreigners seldom visit. He takes the same approach in Tokyo and Kyoto, mapping out hidden finds and planning get-togethers with sake brewers, artists, and designers.  
*Excited about* Niseko ski resort, in Hokkaido. "People are traveling from all over to experience Japanese powder."  
*Years as agent* 13.  
*Wabi-Sabi Japan, Toronto; 647/477-1711; duff@wabi-sabijapan.com.*

MALDIVES  
**Justin Parkinson** ★  
 Parkinson has stayed in about 35 Maldives resorts, evaluating each property against a checklist of 100-plus attributes—from the brand of bathroom amenities to the excursion menus—so he can perfectly match each client with a dream stay.  
*New favorite* The 45-villa Vela Private Island—with a golf academy, a covered tennis court, and a submarine for underwater explorations—is a standout.  
*Years as agent* 8.  
*Other specialty* United Arab Emirates.  
*Linarat Travel, Eagle, Idaho; 800/335-6033; justin@linaratravel.com.*

SOUTHEAST ASIA  
**Catherine Heald**  
 Want to go beyond the Southeast Asia grand tour? Heald might recommend Indonesia's sparsely inhabited Moyo Island or Komodo, to see the world's largest lizards. Her company supports NGO's and educates clients on getting involved in cultural preservation efforts.  
*Excited about* Borneo is becoming increasingly popular, on both the Malaysian and Indonesian sides. "The native orangutan and the gigantic rafflesia flower can't be found anywhere else in the world."  
*Years as agent* 9.  
*Other specialty* Asia.  
*Remote Lands, New York City; 646/415-8092; catherine.heald@remotelands.com.*



The new Brando resort, on Tetiaroa Island, in French Polynesia.

## AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, & THE SOUTH PACIFIC

AUSTRALIA  
**Cassandra Bookholder**  
 Bookholder visits her native country three times a year, always on the lookout for up-and-coming destinations and new ways to explore old favorites such as Sydney and Melbourne. A few recent discoveries: Ningaloo Reef, in Western Australia, where travelers can snorkel right off the beach, and the Great Barrier Reef's lesser-known Palm Cove and Orpheus Island.  
*Top tip* If you're set on snorkeling but can only visit during the wet season (November through March)—not an ideal time for the Great Barrier Reef—head to the nine-suite Capella Lodge, on Lord Howe Island. Three hours off the coast of Sydney, it's surrounded by the world's southernmost coral reef.  
*Years as agent* 8.  
*Other specialty* New Zealand.  
*Camelback Odyssey Travel, Phoenix; 602/889-5902; cassandrab@camelbacktravel.com.*

**Suzu Mercien-Ferol**  
 This Australian crafts each itinerary from scratch, many times including off-the-beaten-path surprises, such as her favorite cafés along the Sunshine Coast or a rain-forest trek followed by a champagne lunch.  
*Discovery* The Narrows Escape, in Montville, Australia, where the six

pavilions have been updated with new bathrooms, custom furnishings, and kitchens. Order barbecue or Italian-food picnics and enjoy them on your cottage's sprawling deck.  
*Years as agent* 20.  
*Other specialty* New Zealand.  
*Touring Treasures, Brighton, Australia; 800/536-5328; suzy.mercien@touringtreasures.com.*

FRENCH POLYNESIA  
**Robin Turner**  
 This A-List veteran acknowledges that her area of expertise is a splurge, so she's made it her mission to uncover value options at the islands' top properties. Turn to her if you're looking for an active vacation: she can schedule archaeologist-led treks on Huahine Island and snorkeling trips in Bora-Bora's turtle- and leopard-ray-filled waters.  
*Special booking* For a couple renewing their vows, Turner planned a helicopter ride to heart-shaped Tupai Island, where they received a Tahitian blessing. They returned to the Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora for a party with music, champagne, and a wedding cake.  
*Years as agent* 28.  
*Other specialty* Maldives.  
*American Express Travel, Chicago; 866/901-1231, ext. 83207; robin.l.turner@aexp.com.*

## Susanne Hamer

Vacations to the South Pacific can feel packaged—unless you get someone creative like Hamer involved. On biannual trips, she charts out the best overwater bungalows for views and privacy, and scouts off-the-radar finds (pearl shops; restaurants) for those looking to explore beyond the hotel.

*New favorite* The Brando, the first luxury resort to open in Tahiti in six years (it was Marlon Brando's personal retreat). The eco-friendly property has 35 villas—each with a private stretch of beach and plunge pool—and is set on Tetiaroa Island, a sanctuary for birds and marine life. *Years as agent* 18.

*Other specialties* Maldives and the Seychelles.

*TravelStore, Los Angeles; 310/689-5411; susanne.h@travelstoreusa.com.*

## NEW ZEALAND

### Jean-Michel Jefferson

No request is off-limits for this South Island-based travel advisor, who counts Maori tribesmen, Kiwi artists, and fly-fishing guides among the friends he can tap on behalf of his clients. Want to helicopter to New Zealand's towering Milford Sound waterfalls? No problem. Eager to snap photos of the country's famous landscapes? He'll arrange an outing with a photographer by your side.

*Excited about* Abel Tasman National Park, on the South Island's northern coast, finally has luxury properties such as the wellness-focused Split Apple Lodge and the English-country-style Edenhouse.

*Years as agent* 13.

*Ahipara Luxury Travel, Central Otago, New Zealand; 64-3/447-3558; jean-michel@ahipara.com.*

### Donna Thomas

Thomas has explored every corner of the North and South Islands on 70-plus visits and always jots down places and ideas—waterfalls where fur-seal pups play; roadside sandwich shops; golfing tips—to incorporate into her jam-packed itineraries. She's particularly savvy about staying within her clients' budgets, a difficult task in this once-in-a-lifetime destination.

*Special booking* The Maori-owned Pounamu Lodge, a two-suite property on the edge of Lake Tarawera, where guests can forage for herbs and spices during a cooking class or soak in natural hot springs only accessible by boat.

*Years as agent* 43.

*Other specialty* Australia.

*New Zealand Travel, Langhorne, Pa.; 800/367-5494; nztravel@aol.com.*

# CRUISING

## SMALL AND LARGE SHIPS

### Scott Kertes

Kertes has sailed on every major cruise line, and can take clients through a comprehensive analysis of boats, itineraries, rooms, activities, and more. He's especially good at explaining the fine print behind all-inclusives: he'll tell you how much that "free" pre-cruise hotel night really costs. Along with vacations for couples and families, he designs group and themed cruises, such as a recent classical music trip to the Baltics, Scandinavia, and Russia organized in conjunction with the Broadway Cares/Equity Fights Aids charity.

*New favorite* The Norwegian *Getaway*, for its great indoor and outdoor kids' zones, 28 dining venues, over-the-top Haven suites with large balconies, and Las Vegas-style entertainment. "There are very few places on this ship where you realize you are sailing with 4,500 other people."

*Years as agent* 24.

*Other specialty* Group cruising. *Hartford Holidays Travel, Garden City, N.Y.; 800/828-4813; scott@hartfordholidays.com.*

### Paul Niskanen ✓

Niskanen excels at advising travelers who believe the main attraction is the destination, rather than the ship. He's personally familiar with hundreds of port cities in Europe, Asia, and South America, and can recommend excursions, restaurants, shops, and private or self-guided tours in each one. He's also traveled along every major river system in Europe, as well as the Nile and the Yangtze.

*Insider find* Restaurants with Finnish cuisine are surprisingly rare in Helsinki, so a reservation at Restaurant Krapihovi is a must if you want to taste local food while you're in port. Set in an old country manor house, it serves pickled herring and smoked perch, and has a friendly, English-speaking waitstaff.

*Years as agent* 40.

*Other specialty* Southern Africa. *Cruise Masters/Concierge Travel Advisors, Portland, Ore.; 800/848-7120; pauln@finevoyages.com.*

### Ruth Turpin

Since founding her cruise-focused agency some 35 years ago, Turpin has taken more than 150 ocean voyages,

giving her a strong understanding of the crucial differences among ships and lines. Even if her clients come to her with little idea of what they're looking for, she has a knack for pairing them with the right cruise.

*Excited about* Luxury lines that are now catering to families. Crystal Cruises, for example, has a "Crystal Family Memories" program: three children travel free with groups of six or more adults, and have access to recreation rooms filled with games and computers.

*Years as agent* 35.

*Other specialty* River cruises. *Cruises Etc., Fort Worth, Tex.; 817/732-6991; ruth@cruisestctravel.com.*

### Mary Ann Ramsey ✓

*See Super-Agents.*

## SMALL SHIPS

### Betsy Patton

No matter the ship, Patton can recommend a quiet corner to read a book, the best place to watch the sunset over particular ports, and, if you're planning a romantic dinner, the top tables to book. Worried about getting a good night's rest? She can even tell you which rooms have beds facing the sunrise.

*Insider clout* Patton set up an afternoon get-together for her client, an art historian

specializing in Picasso, with French photographer Lucien Clergue—who was a good friend of the artist—during a pre-cruise visit to Arles, Provence.

*Years as agent* 36.

*Other specialty* Celebrations. *Hurley Travel Experts, Naples, Fla.; 800/874-1743; betsy@travelexperts.com.*

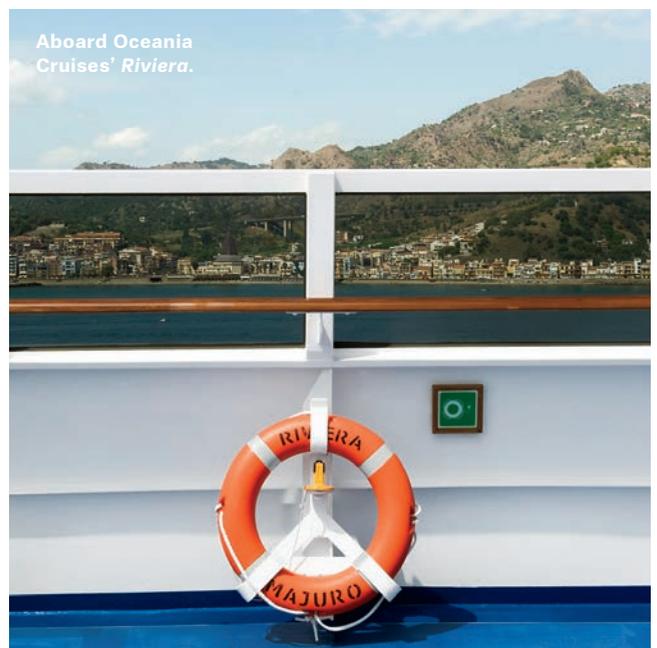
### Marcella Rappoport

When it comes to luxury cruises, Rappoport is known for making the impossible happen. She can book cabins on sold-out ships and secure coveted staterooms, as well as advise travelers on how and when to book for the best value. Her deep relationships in the industry translate into highly personalized voyages for her clients, including welcome gifts, dinners with captains, and customized tours.

*Don't miss* Hands-on cooking classes aboard Oceania Cruises' *Riviera*. There's a culinary center with 12 kitchen stations; travelers learn about cuisines (Turkish; Greek; New Nordic) that tie in with the places they're visiting.

*Years as agent* 32.

*Other specialty* Private jet travel. *Ovation Travel, New York City; 212/329-7260; mrappoport@ovationtravel.com.*



## FAMILY TRAVEL

### Julia P. Douglas ✓

Douglas, who holds dual American and German citizenship, travels constantly with her two young children and is attentive to the particular needs of families on the road, from seamless transfers to appropriate dining options. Her arsenal includes city-centric scavenger hunts, waltz lessons in Vienna, outrigger paddling in Polynesia, and even a cage-dive off the coast of Cape Town with a shark expert.

*Special booking* Douglas curated a six-country, 64-day European adventure for a family with children ages six to 17. She attended to every detail, arranging for private villa rentals, pizza-making classes in Naples, peanut-free meals (because of a food allergy), and even left-handed golf club rentals at St. Andrews Links.

*Years as agent* 9.

*Other specialty* Europe.

*Jet Set World Travel, Chicago; 312/574-1181;*

*julia@jetsetworldtravel.com.*

### Jessica Griscavage

Griscavage is particularly skilled at planning multigenerational trips, most recently a villa rental in the south of France and a culture-focused trip that combined Istanbul and Cappadocia, Turkey. And she has plenty of personal experience with family travel, having taken her young son throughout the Caribbean and to Hawaii.

*Excited about* Increased interest in travel in the U.S. and Mexico. Many of Griscavage's favorite hotels and resorts—including the Ritz-Carlton, Cancun and Four Seasons Resort Lanai, The Lodge at Koele—have introduced family-friendly amenities, such as connecting rooms, toddler beds, and phones that blink instead of ringing (to avoid waking a sleeping baby).

*Years as agent* 10.

*Other specialty* Honeymoons.

*McCabe World Travel,*

*McLean, Va.; 800/747-8401;*

*jessica@mccabeworld.com.*

### Sam McClure

McClure's forte is planning for families who take extended trips, "using the world as their classroom." While her on-staff curriculum consultant arranges the educational components of the journey, McClure maps out the lengthy itineraries,

with a keen understanding of the challenges of crossing time zones with children in tow.

*Insider find* The 14-room Hacienda Zuleta, a 4,000-acre working farm in the Ecuadorian Andes. Along with horseback riding and hiking, families can participate in an Andean condor rehabilitation project and visit on-property archaeological sites dating to 1200 A.D.

*Years as agent* 15.

*Small World Travel,*

*Austin, Tex.; 512/495-9495;*

*sam@smallworld.travel.*

### Kara Slater ★

Slater's twin boys are only three years old, but their travel maps are already full of pushpins. She can arrange to have diapers and formula in hotel rooms upon arrival, and knows which flight routes and seats are best for parents toting tots. She also knows which properties have the best kid-friendly amenities, from goodie bags to personalized bath toys.

*Top tip* Airport greeters—who meet you curbside with boarding passes, whisk you through VIP security lines, lend an extra hand with baggage, and earn you private club privileges—may be worth the splurge, especially at airports like LAX, where the price tag for a family of four is only \$125.

*Years as agent* 5.

*Other specialty* Honeymoons.

*SmartFlyer, Los Angeles; 310/493-*

*5508; kara@smartflyer.com.*

### Kathryn Sudeikis ✓

"Reunions aren't just for backyards anymore," Sudeikis says. "Cruises, safaris, dude ranches, and Disney—these are the places to make memories."

She uses her own extended family (65 strong) as her test group, and is a master of choosing hotels and restaurants that deliver on all counts.

*Special booking* A mother wanted to re-create a childhood vacation for her own family in Oaxaca, Mexico, so Sudeikis made it happen with a stay at convent turned hotel Quinta Real and a trip to the UNESCO site Monte Albán, pre-Columbian ruins outside the city.

*Years as agent* 46.

*Other specialty* India.

*Acendas, Mission, Kans.; 913/671-7700,*

*ext. 325; ksudeikis@acendas.com.*

### Kimberly Wilson Wetty ✓

The co-president of Valerie Wilson Travel has family clients who have relied on her expertise for nearly two decades. She logs their travel history, understands their goals, and keeps track of their interests so that she is prepared to make a range of suggestions, whether it's a relaxed island getaway, a culture-focused European trip, or an adventurous vacation in Patagonia.

*Excited about* Improvements in air travel that are making flying with kids infinitely more comfortable: faster lines, thanks to TSA PreCheck and Global Entry (a must in Wetty's book); better airline lounges; more

restaurant options; and user-friendly amenities such as comfy seats and convenient power outlets.

*Years as agent* 19.

*Other specialty* Cruises.

*Valerie Wilson Travel, New York City; 212/592-1218; kimberlyww@vwti.com.*

## SPECIAL INTEREST

### ADVENTURE

#### Betty Jo Currie

Currie founded her company five years ago with a mission to connect people to far-flung destinations through adventure travel, whether hiking the Peruvian Andes, boating the backwaters of Kerala, India, or observing the immense scale of Tanzania's Great Migration via helicopter. Her strategic partnerships and personal relationships around the globe translate into superior service and attention to her clients.

*Special booking* On a trip through the Indonesian islands, Currie's clients went white-water rafting and biked along rice paddies in Bali, and, on Moyo Island, hiked to waterfalls and overnights at Amanwana Resort, located in a nature reserve.

*Years as agent* 21.

*Other specialty* Africa.

*Currie & Co. Travels Unlimited,*

*Atlanta; 404/335-0286;*

*bettyjo@curriecotravels.com.*

#### Brooke Garnett

Garnett developed her appreciation for travel working as a dive master on Koh Phi-Phi Don, a tiny Thai island in the Andaman Sea. While her itineraries are usually action-packed—she might plan horseback rides through the Atacama Desert, paddleboarding with locals off the coast of Colombia, or whale-shark dives in Australia—she doesn't shy away from purely indulgent moments.

*Special booking* With just two days' notice, Garnett planned a three-week anniversary trip for a couple in New Zealand. They went trout fishing in Taupo, toured

Queenstown by helicopter, and sipped wines at Mission Estate, an 1828 French-Catholic mission turned winery.

*Years as agent* 9.

*Other specialty* Australia.

*Absolute Travel,*

*New York City; 212/627-1950;*

*bgarnett@absolutetravel.com.*

#### Tom Marchant ★ ✓

Cofounder of bespoke luxury travel company Black Tomato, Marchant has built his business with an ear to the ground, always looking for new ways to enable his clients to experience a destination. His enviable black book includes a top vulcanologist in Iceland, a professional explorer in Papua New Guinea, and village leaders everywhere from Tanzania to Thailand.

*Discovery* For travelers who want to pair cultural immersion with incredible wildlife, Marchant recommends the Bayan Ölgii region in remote western Mongolia. "It's a rare experience—staying in a luxury ger (tent) among the nomadic tribes, who teach the ancient art of hunting with eagles."

*Years as agent* 8.

*Black Tomato, London;*

*646/558-3644;*

*tom@blacktomato.com.*

#### Susan Sparks

A disappointing experience with a travel agent inspired Sparks to launch her own agency, which focuses on biking and hiking adventure trips. Knowing not everyone is an adrenaline junkie, she pays particular attention to the level of difficulty. She also studies the

altitude, incline, and quality of paths and trails to ensure her clients are prepared for the experience.

*New favorite* Fogo Island Inn, in Newfoundland, which has uninterrupted views of the wild North Atlantic. It was designed by Canadian-born architect Todd Saunders, and the 29 rooms are individually decorated with locally crafted furniture.

*Years as agent* 27.

*Other specialty* Southeast Asia.

*Points of Interest Travel, Aspen, Colo.; 970/925-5855; susan@poitraveler.com.*

### Doris White

White has pulled off herculean feats on behalf of travelers: when clients lost their luggage before a multiday hike, she got shopkeepers in a remote Swiss village to stay open late so they could buy boots, socks, and poles (on an expense allowance approved by the insurance company, no less). For a group cycling in Burgundy, White planned breaks at private, family-owned vineyards during harvest season.

*New favorite* Hôtel Mont-Blanc, in Chamonix, France, near the Swiss-Italian border. It's been completely renovated, and is a great end point for the Tour du Mont Blanc or any French Alps adventure.

*Years as agent* 26.

*Other specialty* Europe.

*Cadence Travel, La Jolla, Calif.; 858/551-4560; doris@doristrips.com.*

### AIR TRAVEL

#### Michael Holtz

Holtz—nicknamed Mr. Seat 2A—launched SmartFlyer in an effort to create a new breed of advisory firm that not only crafts bespoke leisure and business trips, but also addresses complicated, unglamorous transportation logistics head-on. His connections give him access to ticket pools, such as distressed airline inventory, that don't show up on Kayak or Expedia. Discounts can be as deep as 20 to 40 percent on first- and business-class fares.

*Top tip* Airport clubs are improving all the time, so lounge access is money well spent for frequent travelers who don't typically fly business class or have elite status.

*Years as agent* 24.

*Other specialty* Australia and Asia.

*SmartFlyer, New York City; 800/626-4449; michael@smartflyer.com.*

### BUSINESS TRAVEL

#### Steve Orens ★ ✓

Orens's company, Plaza Travel, is a preferred partner with brands such as Four Seasons, Mandarin Oriental, Rosewood, and Jumeirah—so managers at these properties see to it

that his clients are given room upgrades and special amenities before and after the boardroom. He's known for his streamlined itineraries—destination details, check-in links, and baggage requirements—and he utilizes technology to check and recheck for upgrades and reservation updates.

*New favorite* The recently refurbished Belmond El Encanto, in Santa Barbara, a convenient getaway from L.A. for busy executives. Suites and bungalows have outdoor patios and coastline views.

*Years as agent* 24.

*Other specialties* Family travel and Hawaii.

*Plaza Travel, Encino, Calif.; 818/990-4053; steve@plazatravel.com.*

#### Jennifer Wilson-Buttigieg

A self-described road warrior, Wilson-Buttigieg intimately understands the pressures and priorities of travelers who visit three cities in three days or who are away two weeks a month. In addition to working with individual clients, she plans destination board meetings and executive education programs. *Excited about* Geneva, for its wealth of hotels that cater to a high-end business clientele (the Four Seasons Hotel des Bergues, Mandarin Oriental, President Wilson, and Le Richemond) as well as its between-meeting diversions, including tours of the Musée International de la Réforme (MIR) and the Patek Philippe Museum.

*Years as agent* 23.

*Other specialty* Family travel. *Valerie Wilson Travel, New York City; 212/592-1210; jenniferwb@vwti.com.*

### CULTURE/EDUCATION

#### Margery Hunter

Hunter's enthusiasm for travel (in the past four years alone, she's visited nearly two dozen countries) is matched by her interest in history and culture, which she shares with clients in subtle, meaningful ways. In southern Germany, she'll add a night in the university town of Tübingen, where Hegel and Kepler studied. In Rome, she'll not only direct them to Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* but also give them just the right reading material—the better to bring the magnificent statue to life.

*Excited about* “Colombia is where Peru was 25 years ago,” Hunter says. She recommends visiting the 400-year-old town of Villa de Leyva for its colonial charm and the National Archaeological Park of Tierradentro, a UNESCO World Heritage site, to see little-explored ruins and tombs dating back 1,400 years.

*Years as agent* 30.

*Other specialty* Europe.

*Rudi Steele Travel, Dallas; 214/522-2782; margery@rudisteele.com.*

### DESTINATION CELEBRATIONS

#### John Clifford

Clifford's little black book—filled with nearly three decades of influential contacts—makes him the type of party planner who can book the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice for a private after-hours tour followed by a rooftop dinner. In Northern Ireland, he arranged a surprise birthday party at the Bushmills Inn, and connected the client's family with a genealogist who introduced them to relatives they'd never met.

*New favorite* Drift, a boutique hotel in San José del Cabo, Mexico, that's emblematic of the boom in youthful, independent properties with hip, social spaces. “Think SoHo loft meets Baja rancho style.”

*Years as agent* 29.

*Other specialty* Gay and lesbian travel.

*International Travel Management, San Diego; 619/299-2359; john@internationaltravelmanagement.com.*

#### Jack S. Ezon ✓

*See Super-Agents.*

### DIVING

#### Robert Becker

In the past year alone, this PADI Divemaster has visited Indonesia's Komodo island; Vanuatu, in the South Pacific; the Grenadines; and Canada's Vancouver Island. He is adept at pairing diving opportunities with cultural destinations, and makes a point of working with operators who support local economies and are serious about conservation and sustainable travel. *Discovery* Papua New Guinea, which Becker believes is one of diving's last great frontiers. He sends intrepid travelers to Tawali Leisure & Dive Resort, on Milne Bay, where, he says, “I've seen the best marine life in my twenty-four years underwater.”

*Years as agent* 28.

*Other specialty* Adventure.

*Protravel International/Beckersphere, New York City; 800/227-1059, ext. 9527; robert.becker@protravelinc.com.*

### FLY-FISHING

#### Betsy Donley ✓

Donley's adventures began in childhood, when she accompanied her father, a plant pathologist, to postings throughout Central and South America, picking up Spanish and Portuguese along the way. Today, the 20-year fly-fishing veteran explores the world through

its rivers, leading expeditions and planning private trips to Montana, Belize, Zambia, and beyond.

*Special booking* Donley can arrange a visit to the Yukon that pairs fly-fishing with grizzly-bear watching. Travelers fly in to a remote camp and fish with a river guide who has been tracking the bears since their birth.

*Years as agent* 23.

*Other specialty* Adventure.

*Camelback Odyssey Travel, Phoenix; 800/445-6527; betsyd@camelbacktravel.com.*

#### Mollie Fitzgerald

Annual trips to emerging and bucket-list angler destinations such as Russia, Iceland, and Norway make Fitzgerald an expert on when and where to cast a line. She also provides packing tips that are unique to the sport: don't forget an electric bug swatter, she says, and make sure you have the best flies for the river in which you are wading.

*Excited about* Iceland, for its diversity of activities, from high-end dining to whale-watching, and its proximity to the U.S. “The new Ion Luxury Adventure Hotel was opened by one of our fishing partners and has great winter sports and northern lights viewing excursions.”

*Years as agent* 29.

*Other specialties* India and Southeast Asia.

*Frontiers International Travel, Gibsonia, Pa.; 724/935-1577; mollie@frontierstravel.com.*

### FOOD AND WINE

#### Lynda Turley Garrett

To Garrett, dining experiences are the cornerstone of every trip. She plans entire journeys around meals—not to mention food festivals, cooking classes, market tours, and wine and spirit tastings. In each destination she visits (recently India, Montana, France, Australia, and New Zealand), Garrett makes it a priority to try everything from Michelin-starred restaurants to neighborhood joints. And she's never planned the same itinerary twice.

*Top tip* A meal at a local bistro or a market tour is a great way to get a sense of the culture on a business trip that otherwise would be limited to meeting rooms and convention centers. In Barcelona, for example, a private culinary guide took a client to the Hostafrancs neighborhood to taste locally cured meats.

*Years as agent* 34.

*Other specialties* Australia and New Zealand.

*Alpine Travel of Saratoga, Saratoga, Calif.; 408/379-3853; lyndat@alpine-travel.com.*

**David Rubin**

Having left a successful law practice to found DavidTravel, Rubin still draws on his legal background: he listens to clients with an analytic ear, is an expert at negotiating rates, and has a knack for anticipating—and heading off—problems. He frequently arranges dinners with prominent members of gay communities, even in less tolerant countries such as Kenya and Egypt. *Special booking* On an 80-day around-the-world honeymoon for a biracial gay couple, Rubin ensured that they were warmly welcomed everywhere, including Ethiopia, India, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Dubai. In Siem Reap, Cambodia, he arranged a special blessing from a monk honoring the marriage. *Years as agent* 18. *Other specialty* Destination celebrations. *DavidTravel, Corona del Mar, Calif.; 949/427-0199; david@davidtravel.com.*

## GOLF

**Jani Miller** ✓

Miller, a passionate golfer who has carried her clubs all over the world, has firsthand knowledge of courses and resorts from Scotland to South Africa. Thanks to concierge and club connections, she is able to score coveted reservations at milestone greens and private clubs such as the Old Course at St. Andrews, in Scotland, and Diamante Cabo San Lucas, in Mexico. She's also adept at tailoring a trip to suit the occasion, whether it's a couple's retreat, a guys' weekend, or a girlfriends' getaway. *Special booking* Miller hosted a 10-night sailing trip from Dublin to Hamburg that included five rounds of golf in three countries. The highlight? Attending the final round of the 142nd Open Championship at Muirfield, in Scotland. *Years as agent* 34. *Other specialty* Adventure. *Central Travel, Toledo, Ohio; 800/633-5577; jani@centraltravel.com.*

## HOTELS

**Peter S. Carideo** ★

Carideo asks to see a property's worst rooms first and carries out lengthy assessments that cover everything from linen quality and bedside lighting to how long food

trays linger in the hallways. He and his team are vigilant about visiting hotels not only after they open but also following renovations and brand and management changes. Senior staff is alerted 10 days before clients arrive, and—even if it's a quick business trip—Carideo fills itineraries with reservations at top restaurants.

*New favorite* The Langham Chicago, for its 316 spacious rooms, many of which have excellent city views, and the huge club level floor. Don't miss English tea service or a traditional Chinese medicine spa treatment. *Years as agent* 34. *Other specialty* Multigenerational travel. *CRC Travel, Chicago; 773/525-3800, ext. 22; peter@crctravel.com.*

**Valerie Ann Wilson**

*See Super-Agents.*

**Bobby Zur**

Zur, who founded Travel Artistry 13 years ago, regularly travels the world to inspect properties and connect with hotelier friends—and he's always up-to-date on room layouts, amenities, pricing, and activities. His clients fill out extensive surveys (honeymooning couples complete them separately to ensure honesty) before suggesting destinations and pairing them with resorts. *New favorite* The Royal Portfolio's One Above Penthouse at the One&Only Cape Town. This four-bedroom private-residence suite comes with a gym, chef, and butler, as well as a wraparound terrace and views of Table Mountain. *Years as agent* 13. *Other specialty* Southern Africa. *Travel Artistry, Franklin Lakes, N.J.; 201/848-4113; bobby@travelartistry.com.*

## LUXURY TRAVEL

**David Lowy** ✓

Lowy is known for his ability to curate extraordinary experiences: private viewings of the Sphinx in Egypt and Michelangelo's *David* in Florence, a chance to sit in Churchill's chair in the Cabinet War Rooms in London, or a game of Ping-Pong with Olympic medalists in Beijing. Lowy's name unlocks VIP treatment at hotels around the world, especially at Four Seasons properties, where he is a preferred partner. *Excited about* Hotels that are

making stays more authentic for guests. The Amanjiwo on Java, Indonesia, will organize a dinner in a local's house. The Peninsula Hong Kong surveyed its employees to compile a list of their favorite spots around the city. And the GM at J.K. Place Firenze has access to artisans, shoemakers, and secret passageways. *Years as agent* 28. *Other specialty* Private jet travel. *Renshaw Travel, Vancouver, 800/745-7753; dlowy@renshawtravel.com.*

## SPAS AND WELLNESS

**Karen Benson**

Whether you're looking for a restorative retreat or simply a little pampering, Benson knows where to turn. She has planned ayurveda getaways to India, hikes in Bhutan, and cultural and spiritual experiences in Arizona. She knows not only which treatments to book—but also whom to book them with. *Discovery* The outdoor spa tents at the Resort at Paws Up, in Montana, each of which has an incredible mountain view. Go at night for a moonlight massage. *Years as agent* 31. *Other specialty* Adventure. *Camelback Odyssey Travel, Phoenix; 800/445-6527; karenb@camelbacktravel.com.*

## VALUE/AFFORDABLE TRAVEL

**Kathleen O'Connell** ★

O'Connell may be an industry newcomer, but she's already earned a spot on *Travel Agent* magazine's 30 under 30 list. She's particularly in tune with the millennial market: she secures better hotel rates than what clients find online, and she's an expert at planning short, fulfilling trips for the time-strapped traveler. She scouts shoulder-season deals and investigates transportation options for a range of price points. *Top tip* O'Connell educates her clients on hotel and airline loyalty programs—her current favorites are Starwood Preferred Guest and JetBlue's TrueBlue—and encourages them to sign up to get perks and upgrades. *Years as agent* 3. *Other specialty* Multigenerational travel. *Frosch, Deerfield, Ill.; 800/323-1276; kathleen.oconnell@frosch.com.*

**Harlan DeBell & Kara Bebell**

This brother-and-sister team has deep relationships in the wedding industry across the globe, including florists, caterers, and confectioners. They are often on site at destination weddings, and have planned everything from an intimate party at La Pause hotel, outside Marrakesh, Morocco, to a 150-person, medieval-themed wedding at the Capella Pedregal, in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. *Special booking* Many couples request having dogs at the wedding—or even on honeymoons. DeBell and Bebell have arranged private jets for a French bulldog, a gnocchi dinner for a terrier on Venice's Torcello island, and a poodle-friendly picnic in the Bahamas. *Years as agent* 17. *Other specialty* Pet travel. *The Travel Siblings at Tzell Travel Group, New York City; 877/471-0489; harland@tzell.com and karab@tzell.com.*

**Peter Lloyd**

The president of Century Travel, Lloyd left a career in software sales to dedicate himself to travel planning. He pays equally close attention to details, whether he's working with a huge budget or a small one, and always incorporates surprises into his itineraries. Lloyd is a problem solver who's quick on his feet—once arranging last-minute transport for a wedding cake to a celebration in St. Martin. *Excited about* Uruguay as a nontraditional honeymoon destination. "Amazing properties on beautiful estancias and beaches make this an undiscovered gem. And no jet lag from most U.S. cities!" *Years as agent* 22. *Other specialties* Italy and cruises. *Century Travel, Atlanta; 800/533-6336; peter@centurytvl.com. +*

 T+L's 2014 A-List is also available at [tandl.me/alist14](http://tandl.me/alist14).

**Inside the T+L A-List** Fifteen agents on this list are members of T+L's Travel Advisory Board (TAB); we have noted this in their entries. **Nominations** If you know of an agent who should be considered for T+L's 2015 A-List, send an e-mail with a brief description of the agent's qualifications, as well as contact information, to [tlalist@travelandleisure.com](mailto:tlalist@travelandleisure.com).