

# TRAVEL+LEISURE

Like Follow

SEARCH OUR SITE



SUBSCRIBE  
GIVE A GIFT  
DIGITAL EDITION

DESTINATIONS

GETAWAYS

NEWSLETTERS

TRIP IDEAS

AWARDS

CRUISES

BLOG

VIDEO

## T+L Top Travel Agents



Lisa Lindblad



Maita Barrenechea



Jack S. Ezon



Anne Morgan Scully



Mary Ann Ramsey



Guy Rubin

**THE A-LIST**

These power brokers are the most informed and well connected in the travel industry.



Pallavi Shah



Jim Strong & Nancy Strong



Valerie Ann Wilson



Joel A. Zack

## The 133 Top Travel Agents

Painting classes in an Italian artist's studio, a sail down the Brazilian coast on a private yacht, or 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 book you into sold-out hotels, introduce you to the most keyed-in local guides, and much more.

ADVERTISEMENT

**REDEFINING THE RESORT EXPERIENCE**

**THE BROADMOOR**

EXPLORE

CHECK AVAILABILITY

SCROLL DOWN. SEE MORE.

## SIGN UP

FOR FREE TRAVEL+LEISURE NEWSLETTERS

- Just In: Dispatches from our travel experts, 3x per week
- Weekend Getaways: Weekly inspiration for easy escapes
- Daily Transporter: Your daily dose of travel eye candy

Enter Your E-mail Address

sign up

[How we use your e-mail address](#)

CONNECT WITH TRAVEL + LEISURE





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](mailto: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 specialty* South Africa. *Travel Beyond, Wayzata, Minn.;* 800/876-3131; [craigb@travelbeyond.com](mailto:craigb@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](mailto: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@afrikanadventure.com](mailto:safari@afrikanadventure.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 Altvater

The self-described safari addict visits Africa twice a year, and continuously nurtures his passion for community-based conservancies. Altvater 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.*