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THE LUXURY TRAVEL CLUB FROM TRAVEL WEEKLY



CONNEMARA

Wild terrain and a warm welcome in Ireland's far west

IBIZA

Swap excess for elegance – the White Isle has grown up

HOTEL BUYOUTS

Stays don't come more exclusive than booking the whole place

TRAVELWEEKLY



IN FOCUS

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HOTEL BUYOUTS

Exclusively yours

Whole-hotel bookings are on the rise among high-end clients. Erica Bush reports

Of all the trends to emerge from the pandemic, two are particularly apparent. Not only are affluent travellers looking for heightened levels of privacy and security, they're also desperate to reconnect with extended family and friends after long periods apart.

One way to guarantee both? Book an entire hotel. From a 14-island archipelago in Panama to the former holiday home of an Italian duchess in Mexico, exclusive takeovers are appealing to a growing number of clients.

Rising demand

Carrier and Abercrombie & Kent have both witnessed an uptick in interest for hotel buyouts, with the latter reporting a rise in multigenerational families booking ranches or safari camps in Kenya and Botswana on an exclusive basis.

Preferred Hotels & Resorts' recent Where Next? campaign was dedicated to the trend,



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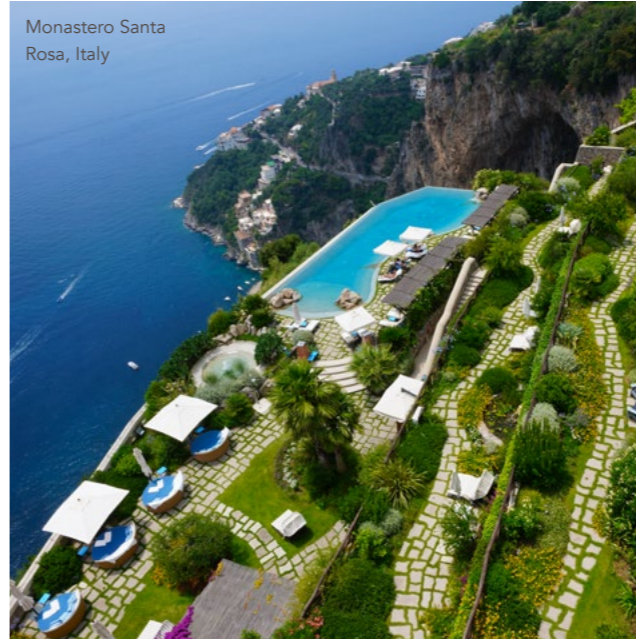
offering guests the chance to select buyouts at more than 135 properties around the world, with options for entire floors, wings or resorts. The hotel group said its global sales team had "fielded more requests over the last six months for partial or entire hotel buyouts than ever before".

In the Maldives, honeymoon-haven Joali has witnessed a "noticeable increase" in exclusive-use enquiries for large groups. Velaa Private Island reports a similar theme, with a rise in interest for whole island buyouts for significant events such as birthdays, weddings and anniversaries. "The requests are for longer stays, larger groups and single destinations that are accessible with one flight, often now with a private charter," says general manager Wayne Milgate. "They are looking for exclusivity." Bradley Calder, general manager of 15-residence Kudadoo Maldives Private Island, agrees, adding: "Some guests love the idea of 'owning' the island, even if it's just for a week or so." →

Zannier Hotels Omaanda, Namibia



Monastero Santa Rosa, Italy



Joali Maldives

CREDIT: OYEN RODRIGUES; JACOB LUND PHOTOGRAPHY; MAURO PARMESANI

Indonesian island resort Nihi Sumba has also recently introduced a \$1 million month-long buyout concept designed to make guests feel “socially distanced yet wildly connected”. Chief executive and partner James McBride says: “Space, privacy and the freedom to engage socially as much as clients want or don’t want is at the heart of this new initiative.

“We will be introducing an opportunity to learn about Sumba, the tribal culture and way of life, so guests understand the island in a deep and meaningful way. This will tap into what new-generation travellers will be seeking post Covid – a trip that is soulful, more human and more honest.”

Even hotels in the UK are benefiting from travellers seeking new levels of exclusivity. Lewis Collins, brand and marketing manager at Kaleidoscope Collection, which includes Bath properties

Homewood and The Bird, says enquiries have “skyrocketed” since the collection reopened in April.

Groups of 20 have been booking Homewood’s Mallingford Mews, a 10-bedroom lodge that has its own garden and four private hot tubs, while self-contained property No.7 Upper Lansdown has been “inundated” by groups of friends or couples looking for “city escapism”.

A new perspective

So what’s leading the change? “Larger group travel, be it families or groups of friends, has been a trend for a few years and Covid has heightened that even further,” says Natasha Towey, head of marketing at Carrier. “Months of isolation has meant we have not been able to see our nearest and dearest so there’s been missed conversation, human contact and quality time together; a holiday

away together is the perfect antidote to reconnect with loved ones from all generations.”

Hiring the whole hotel offers freedom and flexibility and allows families and friends to reconnect without stepping on each others’ toes. It can be more cost effective than one might think too, provided the price is split between a large group, with a range of hotels offering discounts for stays over a certain number of nights. Regardless, Collins believes it’s a price guests are willing to pay for peace of mind. “Guests want to know that the space is their own and that they can fully relax with no need for a face mask and social distancing,” he says. “We’ve also seen that guests are willing to pay more to guarantee complete exclusivity.”

But while the overriding draws seem to be privacy and reconnection for multigenerational families, Velaa’s general

manager says suppliers should be mindful of the evolving needs of such clients in resort, too. “We have seen an increased desire for holidays to include a fitness and wellness component, which indicates an emerging trend for large groups and families trying to reconnect, while taking a greater interest in their wellbeing,” he says.

Infinite choice

So where to go? Whether it’s the 67-suite Finca Cortesin in Spain, home to its own golf course and beach club, or Amanwana, a natural paradise on the island of Moyo in Indonesia, myriad hotels are now available to rent in their entirety.

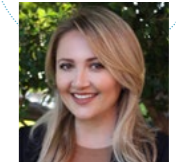
Opt for Panama’s off-grid archipelago Isla Secas, boasting 14 islands, marine wildlife and wild flora and fauna, or Mexico’s discreet Hotel Esencia, originally built for Italian royalty and enveloped by verdant jungle on the Riviera Maya.

Amid the desert plains and rugged landscapes of Namibia, guests can book Zannier Hotels’ Omaanda and Sonop properties, each home to 10 luxury tents and all the amenities you could wish for, such as outdoor swimming pools, cocktail lounges, pool bars and spas. Sonop even has its own private runway.

In Italy, an exclusive takeover of one of the Amalfi Coast’s most sought-after hotels, Monastero Santa Rosa Hotel & Spa, means having free rein of its Michelin-starred restaurant, famous ‘floating’ infinity pool, 12th-century chapel and award-winning spa.

As managing partner Nathan Sharma summarises: “Now more than ever, travel is hinged on maximising quality time together in special, secluded surroundings.” And it doesn’t get more special or secluded than having the whole place to yourself. ●

ASK THE EXPERT



ALISON MCDERMOTT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
GLOBAL MERCHANDISING
AND MARKETING FOR
PREFERRED HOTELS &
RESORTS

Although not a new concept for the ultra-wealthy and celebrities, the pandemic has created a new demand for buyouts among a much wider pool of budgets and group sizes. Hotel buyouts are experiencing an exciting renaissance and fast becoming the next trend to watch in the hospitality space. We foresee them having a continued boom, and not just for leisure stays, but also for business travellers globally. Since launching our Where Next? Buyouts campaign in July, we have received a range of long-term enquiries for domestic and international buyouts, predominantly from the US market so far. Our main goal is to provide guests with unique opportunities to buy and travel differently, and to help them create new memories with loved ones when the time is right for them.