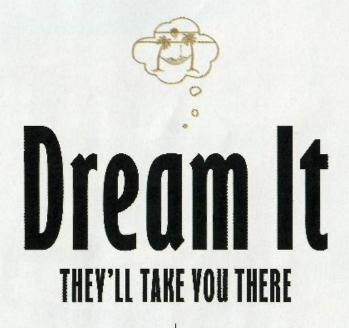


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THE BEST TRAVEL AGENTS HAVE BOUNCED BACK AS THE WORLD'S BIGGEST POWER BROKERS

We've got Alexa, Kayak, Orbitz, and Siri, but actual human travel specialists are still working miracles that machines can't. "The whole point of calling someone like me is to take away the logistics so your trip just flows," says Mara Solomon of the villa-rental agency Homebase Abroad. The right expert can help you bypass the traffic jams on Mount Everest and chopper into Mustang, a high-altitude region that only opened to tourism in 1991, where you can have lunch with Buddhist monks and ride horses through Himalayan villages (Catherine Heald at Remote Lands). He'll get you deep into the Great Rift Valley for an overnight stay with Richard Leakey, the famed paleontologist (Will Jones at Journeys by Design). He'll have you hiking the Lago Chico loop in Chile's Patagonia Park, the private reserve started by Doug and Kris Tompkins, and sailing past the O'Higgins Glacier, one of the Southern Hemisphere's largest (Brian Pearson at Upscape). And she'll hustle you into the Sangha Trinational conservation area, spanning the borders of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and the Republic of the Congo, to stalk chimps, elephants, and gorillas in raw rain forest (Kate Doty at GeoEx). Or you could just try googling this stuff. P.B.