



GLOBAL

*Traveling around the world
has been the ambition of
globetrotters for millennia.
But it's never been so easy—
or so cushy—as it is now*

BY LARRY OLMSTED

When it comes to bucket-list trips it's hard to think of a bigger bucket than the entire planet. The concept—circling the earth—has been around since Pythagoras first posited that the world was round in the fifth century B.C. When the Spanish first achieved it in 1522, it took three years. By the 19th century the fictional Phileas Fogg was struggling to do it in 80 days. Today, a jet can do it in two days straight.

But what's the fun in that? Today's globetrotters savor the romantic journey, taking in all the sites with



OPPOSITE TOP: OLIVER KLAMT / UNSPLASH; OPPOSITE BOTTOM: ROCKET X



Around-the-world jet service can deliver guests in ultimate luxury to such far-flung destinations as Bali (top left), Easter Island (top right), an African safari (bottom right) and Sydney, Australia (bottom left).



AGENDAS





Magellan's crew may have roughed it on the first-ever around-the-world voyage, but Regent's *Seven Seas Splendor* (above and right) offers its considerable luxuries to modern travelers wishing to circumnavigate.

little effort or planning. The world, if not your oyster, is certainly attainable. You're a history buff? Visit the Taj Mahal, the Great Pyramid of Giza, Easter Island, Machu Picchu and Angkor Wat in one fell swoop. Instead of five long trips stretched over years, you fill your bucket in one to five months—and in high style. Or say wildlife is your thing. You can go swimming with whale sharks, the world's largest fish, in the Philippines one day, watch orangutans frolic in Borneo the next, then zip over to Kenya for a classic African luxury safari before heading to Rwanda to trek with gorillas. These dream trips are all about packing a "Best of the World" travel itinerary into a single decadent trip.

Three options for circumnavigation dominate the category.

Around The World Cruises

Cruising is the oldest method of circling the globe. In 1922, American Express offered the first continuous passenger trip around the world, chartering one of Cunard's grand ocean liners, the *SS Laconia*, for a 130-day itinerary from—and to—New York City. After more than a century, Cunard is still at it, with a slate of world cruises scheduled three years out. They currently have half a dozen world trips offered between 100 and 115 nights, priced from around \$17,000 per person for the most basic double room.

Cunard is hardly alone. Round-the-world (RTW) tour cruise companies include such top-tier luxury lines as Regent Seven Seas, Viking, Oceania, Silversea, Seabourn and Crystal and mainstream carriers such as Holland America, Royal Caribbean and Princess. Cruises can offer the best bang for the buck, with some options starting at under \$200 a day, including meals and lodging. But you may get charged for everything from alcohol to Wi-Fi to shore excursions. Some limit higher-end restaurants to suite passengers or add surcharges. On the other end of the scale, Regent Seven Seas offers a 133-day world cruise, visiting 70 ports in 18 countries, from Fiji, Bali and Japan to Hawaii and



Alaska, starting at around \$90,000 per person and capping out at close to a million for the largest suite. Then again, you pay nothing extra for shore excursions, all dining and specialty restaurants, 24-hour room service, luxury adult beverages and customizable in-room mini bars including wines and Champagne, all gratuities, laundry and dry cleaning. Such top lines as Crystal and Viking often throw in free business-class tickets to the start and finish of world cruises. Viking currently offers the longest of these itineraries: stretching for 170 days and hitting 39 countries (and every inhabited continent), starting at \$82,000 per person.

In almost every case, these 100-plus day trips are also broken into segments and sold as shorter legs. Some third-party operators piggyback on established cruises, adding experts, lecturers and shore excursions. Nancy Voight, a passenger who took an educationally focused Road Scholar trip on Cunard, reports, "There's a mystique to going around the planet. It was so much fun the first day to wake up and think, 'I'm going

TOP: PETE BARRETT; BOTTOM: STEPHEN BLAUDET

around the world today.' But that feeling never ended, and it was the same each time we went someplace new, crossing the Indian Ocean, pulling into Cape Town or Singapore. We lived like old aristocrats, with butlers and staff. They take special care of the around-the-world passengers, it never gets boring, they make sure the food never gets old." The 2027 Road Scholar trip starts at \$35,000, about twice what Cunard charges for the same cabin, but adds 64 expert lectures and dozens of special shore excursions.

RTW cruises may include VIP lounges and concierges. "What sets these apart are added experiences specifically for world-cruisers," says luxury travel advisor Dionne Evans, owner of agency Travel by DAE. These may include private galas like a Bollywood-style party in Cochin, India (Silversea), a formal affair at the Convento do Beato in Lisbon, Portugal, (Regent Seven Seas) and a Bon Voyage dinner hosted by celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck at Spago Beverly Hills (Seabourn).

Agencies with high volume may secure valuable extras for clients such as cabin upgrades and onboard credits. "I think the

Crystal at the captain's dinner for her milestone of 75 world-cruise segments. "I have had the same butler, Jijo, for every world cruise I have booked. He knows what my food allergies are and how far I can comfortably walk."

Around The World by Private Jet

When most people talk about flying private, it's code for little planes. But when going around the world it means a Boeing 757 or 767, Airbus A321, A319 or similar. In just about every case, these aircraft are specially reconfigured to all-business/first class jets, with far fewer passengers and nothing but true lay-flat seats that convert to beds. Abercrombie & Kent (A&K), one of the world's oldest luxury tour operators and one of the most experienced at RTW, charts its custom 757 from Icelandair complete with a cherry-picked crew. With A&K, a Boeing 757, which was designed for 239 passengers, carries a maximum 48 guests in the utmost comfort. Vintage Dom Perignon is free flowing, complementing the caviar service. Other staples are restocked along the way, as one passenger recalls, "The chef picked up fish before we



Aman Resorts connects its Amangalla hotel in Sri Lanka (above) with Amanranya, its venue in Turkey (above right) by way of a low-occupancy private jet (right) with attentive service.



real appeal of a world cruise is comfort," says Jennifer DiDonna, of Amazing Journeys & More. That includes a home base with the need to unpack only once. The best suites and itineraries should be booked at least 18 to 24 months ahead, she adds.

Many clients are repeat travelers. Christeen Isgro and her husband recently embarked on their sixth circumnavigation, all with Crystal. Among the highlights, she says, are waking up each day in a new part of the world, exploring extraordinary destinations and forming friendships.

June Nelson has been world cruising for 32 years and was recently honored by



left Tokyo and on the flight to the Philippines we had the best sushi you could ever have on a plane."

Because jets travel faster than cruise ships, airborne RTWs are shorter in duration, with most itineraries taking three to four weeks. Flying also means reaching destinations from any port, often in a few hours. This allows for more time on location. In almost all cases, you spend nights in luxury hotels (or safari camps). A&K taps such brands as Ritz-Carlton, Mandarin Oriental, Oberoi, Six Senses and One & Only. Such luxury hotel brands as Four Seasons and Aman have developed private-label RTW jet programs, using their own hotels whenever possible.

You can jet between tigers in India, gorillas and lions in Africa, visit canyons and waterfalls and tour such ancient sites as Machu Picchu.

While world cruises hew to ports in their overall path, jet trips tend to be thematic, jetting between tigers in India, gorillas and lions in Africa, natural wonders (canyons, deserts, waterfalls) and ancient sites including Machu Picchu, Easter Island and the Egyptian pyramids. Aman's focus is on cities with stops in Kyoto, Dubai, Venice and Marrakech. Four Seasons has a world-of-wellness-themed trip, using an A321-neo configured for 52 guests.

Aman has taken a slightly different tack, partnering with luxury tour company Remote Lands, to offer fewer guests a more private experience. Their Airbus A319 holds just 18 passengers and includes a bar. Remote Lands handles ground details and provides every couple or solo traveler with a private car, driver and guide in each destination. "You can experience multiple regions in one trip without compromising comfort, flexibility, privacy or the caliber of guiding," says Catherine Heald, CEO of Remote Lands.

"All the top operators have all lay-flat seats, and if you want to see 10 or 12 places in three weeks it is hard to beat the price," says Michael Holtz, founder of SmartFlyer, one of the world's largest luxury travel agencies. The company has strong expertise in all things aviation, but is a full-service agency doing corporate-travel, cruises, honeymoons, safaris and lots of private jet and cruise trips.

While the prices are eye-popping (running past \$200,000), it would be nearly impossible to replicate the logistics and time-saving on your own. Rami Girgis, director of the private jet division at A&K, says that about 1,000 employees are used to support a typical trip for less than four dozen guests. One result is police-escorted motorcades to bypass Bali's stifling traffic.

These companies offer a plush in-flight experience with luxury hardware, private chefs on board, premium beverages, high-end headphones and toiletries. The top operators typically travel with a dedicated trip physician, a photographer and include the services of a passport-and-visa-expediting company for the substantial paperwork. They also provide specialized local guides and lots of

gala dinners and receptions. A&K ships in high-tech coffee machines to a remote lodge in Borneo so guests can face orangutans having enjoyed an espresso or cappuccino first.

"They do so much behind the scenes to make things happen seamlessly," reports one couple on a third RTW trip, this one a "Wildlife" expedition with A&K. They would book another such trip, just four months later: "Tropics to Arctic." Most of the company's RTW itineraries last for 24 to 26 days and start at around \$198,000 per person. The Aman/Remote Lands 2026 global journey is 22 days from \$209,000, TCS has multiple 24-day trips starting at \$155,000, while a 21-day Four Seasons journey is \$219,000. Road Scholar is the most affordable, starting at \$90,000 for a 21-day trip. It eschews famous-name luxury hotels, yet still uses an all-flat seat 767-300 that holds just 54 and provides expert tours of famed UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Uniworld, a river-cruise company operating across Europe, Africa and Asia, offers a hybrid air-and-water approach with its annual Rivers of the World cruise. Different iterations visit each of the three continents, flying guests from one river to the next. Starting at about \$1,000 a day per person, the trips of about 50 days utilize the company's ultra-luxurious Super Ships. River cruising has the advantages of almost guaranteed smooth sailing and nonstop sightseeing as you pass beside the river banks.

Around The World Airline Tickets

This is the least well-known method for circling the globe and can be the most affordable. However, it involves a lot of planning, while the turnkey cruises and private jet tours require little more than a credit card in the way of heavy lifting. Since these tickets are convoluted, you may need to use a travel adviser to plan lodging, tours, transfers, meals and entertainment at every stop.

Years ago, all the big global airlines offered around-the-world tickets that were the favorites of backpacking college students. They provided a virtually unlimited number of stops for one set fare as long as you kept moving in the same direction. The new model is more flexible, goes more places and is less expensive, at least for luxury travel, as these fares now court business and first-class RTW travelers—at steep discounts.

As individual airlines do not themselves offer such formats at retail, the two options are through the major consortiums—Star Alliance and Oneworld—who package them. This is a bonus for U.S. consumers, as foreign airlines in these alliances tend to be of much higher quality than domestic anchors. It also opens up flights to virtually every corner of the planet, places no one airline can fly you to.

The methodology of both is similar, you opt for a certain number of stops in a continuous direction, and usually get a few free bonus legs per continent. For instance, a flight from New York to London may include hops to two or three more European cities at no charge before moving further east, to say, Delhi. While not strictly flat, such pricing comes at a flatter rate, based on the number of legs, continents or total miles traveled as opposed to the retail cost of each flight. If you are making even two to three extra stops on a trip to Hong Kong or Tokyo, it can be considerably cheaper than regular tickets. And big dreamers can usually travel for up to a year.