

JACK'S CAMP BOTSWANA

This pioneering camp of 10 elegant, khaki-green Rajasthani tents marooned on a grassy island on the edge of the Makgadikgadi salt pans has remained a standout hit for years. Here the intermittent rustling of the mokolwane palm trees is often the only sound breaking the utter silence. Lunar like, the pans stretch for thousands of kilometres in all directions and are littered with fossils and Stone Age artefacts. Founded by fifth-generation safari operator, explorer and naturalist Ralph Bousfield, in memory of his crocodile-hunting late father Jack, the camp is a place to be adventurous and also educated. The guides are all long-standing experts in their fields, from zoology to palaeontology, and walkabouts are led by a resident bushmen clan. Jack's is big on the classic, old-school East African safari experience, with Persian rugs, paraffin lanterns, brass fittings, mahogany campaign furniture, antique four-poster beds and raucous, communal dining in a mess tent. But it's the choice of experiences, some dictated by the dramatic seasonal changes to the landscape, that ultimately thrill the most. In the dry season, meerkats and brown hyena are the unlikely stars of the show and zooming across the pans on quad bikes is obligatory. After the summer rains, lush grasses attract migrating herds of zebra and flamingos in their thousands. At any time of the year, it's a photographer's dream. Those who get to camp out under the stars near Kubu Island can consider themselves members of an elite club. +27 210 011 574; naturalselection.travel.

Double tents from about £2,090 all inclusive



BALLYFIN IRELAND

'*Coûte que coûte*' goes the punning family motto of Sir Charles Coote, for whom the opulent Ballyfin estate was conceived in the early 19th century. 'No matter the cost' is how this loosely translates, proving as apt an adage in the 21st century as it was then. Many millions of euros may have been lavished on this stately pile in County Laois, both in its original construction and, more recently, its painstaking restoration. For the architectural historian, the house is a head turner – the culmination of Regency craftsmanship brought together in lusciously modelled plasterwork, scagliola in varying colours, stained glass and staggeringly intricate parquetry. For the sybarite, the house is a place of comfort and grandeur, not least in the Gold Drawing Room where walls are hung with lustrous silk and vast windows frame views of the 28-acre lake. Bedrooms are also decorated with rich fabrics and wallpaper, fine antiques, fresh flowers from the garden, art and books – a fabulous amalgamation of Anglo-Irish panache. New this year is Ballyfin's 21st room and first standalone property: the tiny Gardener's Cottage (surely Ireland's ultimate love-nest), overlooking, to the rear, the walled gardens, which supply Ballyfin's kitchen with organic fruit and vegetables. The grounds are made for strolling in the complimentary wellies, with grottoes and rockeries, a folly and a fernery, a rose garden and an aviary. There is no finer Irish-country house experience. +353 578 755 866; ballyfin.com.

Doubles from about £490

