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GALLERY TRAVEL

A Villa in the White Desert


A LUXURY TRAVEL COMPANY TAKES EXTREME TRAVEL TO A NEW LEVEL BY BEING THE FIRST EVER TO FLY TO THE INTERIORS OF ANTARCTICA IN A PRIVATE JET

IT ALL BEGAN 11 years back when Patrick Woodhead, CEO, White Desert, decided to explore the world's loneliest and the most deserted place. Inspired to build a luxury camp in Antarctica, Woodhead conceptualised and successfully created White Desert, an exclusive camp that takes travellers to the virgin whites of the continent, away from the clutter of routine cruise ships and tourist groups.

Now, over a decade after realising his dream, Woodhead's White Desert has ventured into something that no other camper or tour operator has ever attempted. This year, they will be flying their campers in a Gulfstream V.

"Until last year we used to fly in monstrous Russian cargo planes. But since we've always wanted our guests to enjoy their stay in ultimate luxury and comfort (after all this isn't an expedition, it's meant to be a leisurely trip), a private jet fits the plan perfectly well," says Woodhead.

The camp has been slowly and steadily built over the decade, starting with plain tents that have now transformed into a




boutique hotel that has (igloo-like) fiberglass pods designed considering the weather. The igloos, more like bespoke villas, have a certain degree of luxury, with satellite phones, an in-house chef, lounge, dining room, bedroom and enough space to relax while enjoying the views of the frozen lake that's right outside the site. "What's interesting is that we are just about 2.5 kilometres away from the Indian scientists' research camp. So we get to interact a lot with them; it's a welcome change for them after being away from home for months," he shares.

The trip starts from Cape Town, South Africa, flying over 4,500 km across the southern ocean to Antarctica. They fly eight back-to-back trips from November to January each year. "November is the time when the continent wakes up. It's absolutely stunning with 24-hour sunlight and the purest of white shining bright," he says. And like he mentions, the seven-day camp doesn't expect you to be tough and 'ready for an expedition'. In fact, he says that their client manager holds the guests' hands right through the registration process to the freezing -25 degrees. The activities at the camp are also entirely fun-based. Guests are flown to the Emperor Penguin Colony that has over 6,000 penguins that have never been hunted and so are completely unafraid of humans. "They let you take pictures and even come right up to you," smiles Woodhead. "Apart from this, our guests enjoy activities at our amphitheatre, learn to ski, and even experience zip-lining across rivers," he adds.

Unlike routine cruise ships that take close to 100 tourists, White Desert aims at minimising human impact by taking only 12 guests per trip, and maintaining the natural beauty of the place by using solar power and natural gas. The camp that's a favourite among the global elites including the Saudi royalty and Prince Harry, costs 68,000 euros



per person. There's also a four-day trip option, and some guests even include it as a one-day trip in their South African safari itinerary.

"We take our guests to the unexplored, pure white Antarctica, away from the dark side that's muddied with regular tourists and campers. We do it small and do it well," he says. - ADEE DANIK

White Desert, www.white-desert.com

The lounge (above) and sleeping pod (above) in the fiberglass igloos (top) at White Desert.