

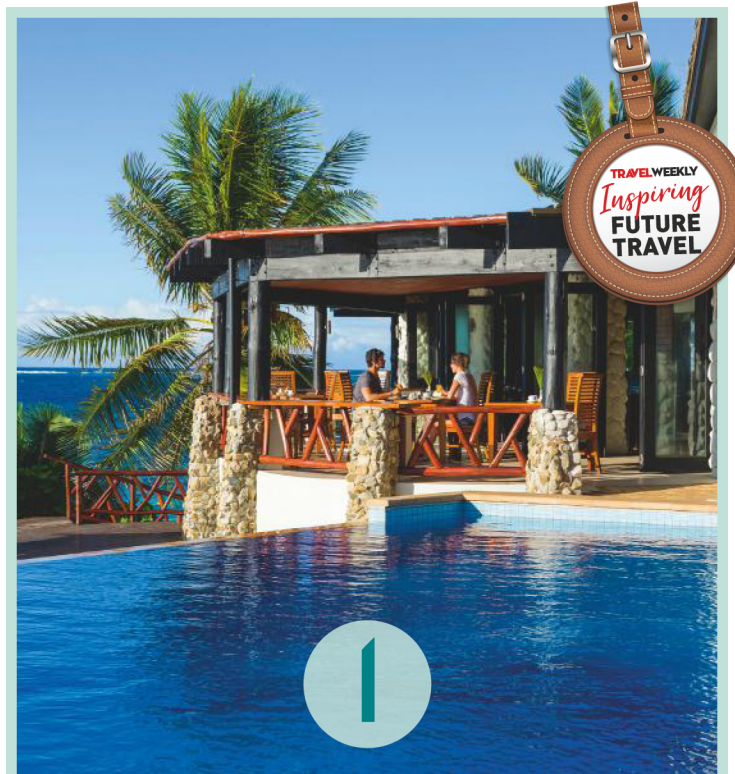
of the BEST

AUSTRALASIA ADD-ONS

Go the extra mile with **Laura French's** pick of the best adventures worth tagging on to a trip Down Under

Australia and New Zealand's borders might be closed for the time being, but that doesn't mean clients can't start planning a big trip for when travel to the region does resume.

This past year has given locked-down travellers the chance to dream of their next adventure, with many plotting a blowout escape to make up for lost time. To help you cater for those planning an epic trip, we've highlighted some of the best add-on experiences across Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, from penguin-spotting on Stewart Island and sailing in the Whitsundays to sampling Polynesian culture in Samoa and getting culinary in Tasmania.



ESCAPE TO FIJI

If clients are coming this far, they might as well top it off with an exotic escape to one of the world's most dreamed-about destinations – Fiji. Viti Levu and Vanua Levu might be the best-known of Fiji's 300 islands, but for a quieter escape, recommend the volcanic Mamanuca Islands, says Brian Hawe, product manager for First Class Holidays. "My favourite resort here is the Tropica Island Resort on Malolo Island," he says. "The staff are amazing, the food is superb and the sunsets are incredible." For clients with time to linger, he suggests pairing it with Matamanoa Island Resort, where Fijian-style bures (huts) flank a vibrant reef.

Book it: A six-night break twinning both costs from £2,389 per person (half-board), including helicopter transfer, boat transfers and flights from Australia or New Zealand. fcholidays.com



SAVOUR A POLYNESIAN WELCOME IN SAMOA

If beaches plucked from paradise, rainforests filled with wildlife and waters the colour of cobalt sound like your clients' thing, suggest a trip to Samoa, where authentic Polynesian cultures meet rustic, one-off stays. The biggest of its nine islands are Savai'i, home to plunging waterfalls and forested volcanoes, and Upolu, where deserted beaches sit side by side with colourful, sleepy villages. Jetset Tailor Made suggests pairing the two, with stays at the Amoa Resort (pictured) – home to 15 bungalows set on a crystal-clear lagoon – and Coconuts Beach Club Resort, which boasts Samoa's only overwater villas.

Book it: Three nights at Coconuts Beach Club on Upolu and two nights at Amoa Resort, Savai'i, costs from £1,065, based on two sharing B&B with flights from Sydney on December 5. jetsetflights.co.uk

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VISIT NEW ZEALAND'S BAY OF ISLANDS

New Zealand might be a small country, but it packs a lot in – and if clients haven't already got the Bay of Islands on their list, it's time to add it. Located about three hours' drive north of Auckland, this 144-island archipelago is a hotspot for penguins, dolphins, whales and other wildlife, with subtropical rainforest, scenic coastal trails and charming seaside towns among the lures. Anzcro has a five-day self-drive taking in the highlights, including a dolphin-spotting cruise with a visit to the famous Hole in the Rock on Motukako Island and a guided day trip to Cape Reinga, the most northerly point of the country, where adventurers can sandboard in the shade of native kauri trees.

Book it: From £552, including accommodation, car hire and activities. anzcro.co.uk



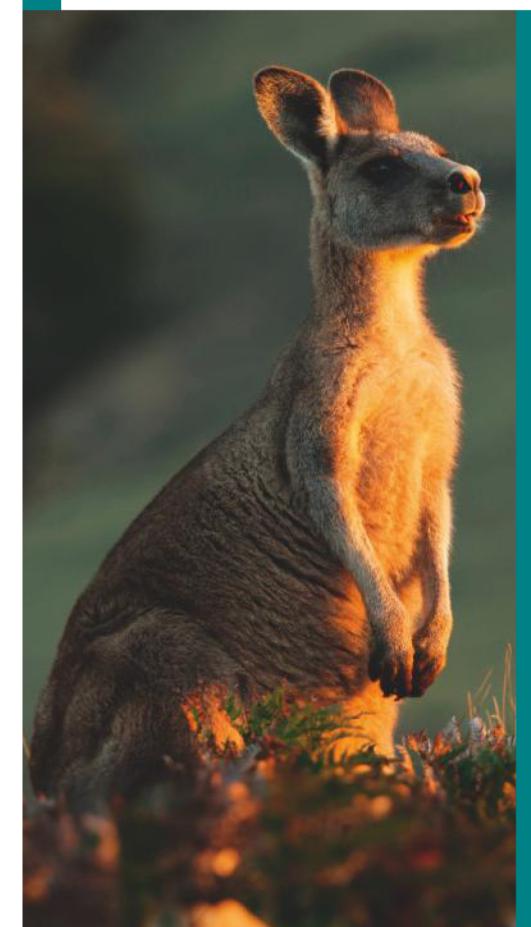
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HOP OVER TO TASMANIA

From craggy coastlines studded with seals and penguins to the Alpine peaks of Cradle Mountain National Park, Tasmania's natural beauty is well-documented – but it's not only about the wildlife. This diverse island is home to a growing culinary scene, with locally produced gin, whisky and wine meeting fresh seafood, truffles and cheese, and a string of gourmet restaurants on hand to celebrate its foodie heritage. APT homes in on the best of them on a six-day Epicurean 4WD Escape, with a string of culinary experiences ranging from oyster-harvesting to wine tasting, plus other highlights including a visit to the Museum of Old and New Art and a trip to Maria Island, once a site for convicts.

Book it: Prices for 2022 to be confirmed.

aptouring.co.uk



DESTINATIONS

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SPOT PENGUINS ON STEWART ISLAND

If you've got keen birdwatchers on your hands, New Zealand's third-largest isle is well worth recommending. Stewart Island's rugged landscapes are home to more kiwis than humans, and it boasts a smattering of penguins, including the rare yellow-eyed variety, to boot. Gold Medal pairs a visit here with a half-day trip to the neighbouring isle of Ulva, where native bird species live predator-free and there are no human inhabitants, making for an especially tranquil escape.

Book it: A three-night stay in the gateway city of Invercargill (on the southerly tip of New Zealand) costs from £383 (room-only), including a day trip to Stewart Island and half-day tour to Ulva. goldmedal.co.uk

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Cook Islands: For more Polynesian hospitality – plus ultramarine waters, emerald jungles and forest-covered mountains – look to the Cook Islands, a 15-strong archipelago whose beating heart is Rarotonga, located a four-hour flight from Auckland. Premier Holidays, Cox & Kings and Kuoni are among the operators that sell the islands.

Whitsundays: For a Down Under add-on clients won't forget, suggest an island-hopping trip around the crystal-clear waters of the Whitsundays. Intrepid Travel offers a six-day sailing trip here from £1,380, starting at the coastal town of Airlie Beach in Queensland and visiting several isles, with swimming, snorkelling and sunbathing opportunities aplenty along the way.

New Guinea: For clients really wanting to go off the beaten track – and make up for lost time with a bumper trip they'll never forget – Exodus Travels has a 14-day Secret Valleys of New Guinea tour that takes guests to explore this remote, rarely visited island. Highlights include attending the Baliem Valley Cultural Festival to meet the indigenous Dani people, canoeing alongside crocodiles on the Karawari River and staying in remote wilderness lodges. Prices start at £10,780, including domestic flights.

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RIDE THE GHAN TO THE RED CENTRE

For clients heading to Australia, no visit is complete without a trip to the Red Centre to watch the sun rise above Uluru or walk the rim of the extraordinary Kings Canyon (*pictured*). Add in a ride on cross-country train the Ghan and it's hard to turn down AAT Kings' six-day Outback Railway trip, which takes passengers rolling from the verdant hills of Adelaide through the desert wilderness to reach a base in Alice Springs. From there, clients will explore the highlights of the outback and learn all about Aboriginal culture on daily excursions and once-in-a-lifetime experiences – not least a sunset barbecue dinner beneath the stars with Uluru as a backdrop.

Book it: From £2,051, including accommodation, some meals, transport and driver-guide. aatkings.com

PICTURES: Shutterstock; Chris McLennan; AAT Kings