

FOOD

and

TRAVEL

DESERT DREAMS

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ESCAPE TO THE SUN

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NAMIB DESERT, NAMIBIA

Why go Estimated to be 55-80 million years old, the Namib Desert is said to be the world's oldest. This ancient land stretches across 2,000km along the Atlantic Coast of Angola, Namibia and South Africa and is characterised by its vast red-sand seas, desert-adapted wildlife, such as the oryx, and giant sand dunes. One of the desert's most mesmerising sights, Sossusvlei, is found at the heart of the Namib Desert, within Namib-Naukluft National Park. In this striking salt and clay pan, the stark white Deadvlei contrasts with its red dunes, which at heights of up to 350m are among the world's highest, and petrified, black acacia trees – dating back more than 900 years – dotting this surreal landscape.

The stay Namib Dune Star Camp, part of Namibia's sustainable tourism operator Gondwana Collection, sits on the crest of ancient sand dunes overlooking the Namib Desert. In this desert wilderness north of Sesriem, nine raised cabins with balconies join a central restaurant and bar, with an outdoor deck for dining under the stars. From this eco-friendly camp, days can be spent on guided walks and bird watching before stargazing after sundown. A stay here can be combined with time at nearby sister property Namib Desert Lodge, which lies at the foot of fossilised dunes, with trails leading into the desert. Day trips take you over to Sossusvlei.

The details Doubles from £316. gondwana-collection.com

Above and below: The vast red-sand seas of the Namib Desert are experienced to the full during a stay at Namib Dune Star Camp



SOME LIKE IT HOT

Explore otherworldly terrains, watch the sun set over the dunes and sleep beneath the stars at desert hideaways in some of the world's most mesmerising landscapes, says Lauren Jade Hill

From top: The dramatic backdrop of Nayara Alto Atacama; vistas stretching across the Andean lagoons of Miscanti and Miñiques



ATACAMA DESERT, CHILE

Why go Sand dunes rise up to 100m in the dramatic valleys of the highest, driest non-polar desert on Earth, while geysers gurgle in otherworldly geothermal fields punctuated with vividly aquamarine and emerald hot springs. Volcanic peaks, salt flats and wind-sculpted canyons distinguish the landscape of this desert plateau stretching 1,600km between the Pacific Ocean and the Andes in northern Chile. Staying in and around the adobe-style village of San Pedro de Atacama, adventure-seeking travellers come to look out over the red rocks and salt-encrusted landscape of Valle de la Luna, explore flamingo-inhabited Tara Salt Flat and take in El Tatio's geothermal wonders.

The stay Tucked into a protected valley just outside San Pedro de Atacama, Nayara Alto Atacama lies within an oasis created by rainfall threading down the mountainside. Red rock rises up behind the luxury lodge, whose adobe walls match the terrain. Andean landscaping, cultivated with indigenous plants, helps it blend in with the environment. Both community and environment benefit from the lodge's sustainability ethos and, through colours, textures and materials, the interiors reflect local culture. The restaurant fuses a modern aesthetic with indigenous influence, its zero-kilometre menus further connecting you to the area.

The details Doubles from £584. nayaraaltoatacama.com





Left and below: The High Atlas massif draws adventure seekers, who find supreme comfort at Inara Camp



AGAFAY DESERT, MOROCCO

Why go Just south of Marrakech, this lunar-like landscape of rocky dunes sprawls, seemingly endlessly, against a dramatic backdrop of the Atlas Mountains. Several Berber villages lie in and around this land, which is also inhabited by wildlife such as the fennec fox and desert hare. It's a rolling, rugged white terrain, spanning around 160sq km of the High Atlas massif, which attracts adventurers looking for active desert pursuits such as camel trekking, buggy tours and quad biking. Luxury camps provide a base amid the arid environment, which glows at dusk under the setting sun.

The stay Inara Camp is set across 21 hectares of this unique environment. On the higher land stands its scenic restaurant, with the camp's 19 tented suites positioned to overlook the desert vista. Exploration is the theme that runs throughout the interiors, which are decorated with Moroccan crafts. Restaurant Le Cercle shines a light on the produce of nearby farms and fire-side dinners are served under the stars. Days here are spent exploring the landscape on camel treks and hikes. At the camp, yoga and stargazing are offered alongside pottery sessions.

The details Doubles from £241. inaracamp.com





MOAB DESERT, USA

Why go Red-rock Moab lies within the arid high desert region, at over 1,200m above sea level, of south-eastern Utah. Soaring mesas and striking red sandstone formations define this environment, which is the gateway to the arches and pinnacles of Arches National Park and the desert landscape carved by the Colorado River in Canyonlands. Outdoor enthusiasts make the journey here to hike through the rugged terrain, white-water raft on its rivers and drive off-road. The small town of Moab provides a base for adventurers, with several camps and lodges in the desert nearby.

The stay Just south of Moab town, Ulum Moab lies within an 80ha expanse of desert, right by the monumental Looking Glass Arch – so named for its circular opening

resembling a round mirror. The resort connects guests with the environment through stays in 50 tented suites, each combining modern amenities with an organic aesthetic and encompassing outdoor decks for making the most of the views. Pathways, lit by solar lights after dark, lead between each suite and shared spaces, which include dipping pools and a glass-sided lobby opening out to a terrace, home to the resort's panoramic restaurant. Seasonal menus draw inspiration from south-western flavours in a light-filled, contemporary space overlooking the arid terrain.

The details Doubles from £518. ulumresorts.com



Top: Ulum Moab sets you down in the heart of Utah's red-rock high desert region, with a view of Looking Glass Arch. Below: One of hundreds of natural stone arches in the national park



KALAHARI DESERT, BOTSWANA

Why go A semi-arid sandy savannah covering much of Botswana as well as parts of South Africa and Namibia, the Kalahari Desert encompasses undulating sandy plains, all above an altitude of 900m, long chains of dunes reaching up to 60m in height and vleis (dry lakes) at the end of long-ago dried-up streams. Acacias and the distinctive baobab grow among the desert vegetation, which varies dramatically from north to south, and wildlife is in abundance even in the most arid areas. The vast Makgadikgadi Salt Pans lie within the Kalahari Desert of north-eastern Botswana as a reminder of the enormous Lake Makgadikgadi that dried up tens of thousands of years ago.

Clockwise from top left: Camp Kalahari dining; a Bushman encounter; fireside at sundown; mokolwane palms dot the scene; meerkats are camp regulars

The stay Camp Kalahari is hidden among the acacia trees and mokolwane palms of Brown Hyena Island on the edge of the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans. Within this surreal landscape, cultural encounters unfold with Zu//hoasi bushmen, and sightings of rare brown hyenas, meerkats, bat-eared foxes, aardvarks, zebras, lions and cheetahs bring the landscape to life. The understated camp hosts guests in 12 Meru-style canvas tents kitted out with antique furnishings, Moroccan kilims and four-poster beds. A living and dining area brings guests together for family-style meals and there's a pool for refreshing dips in the heat of the day.

The details Doubles from £598. naturalselection.travel



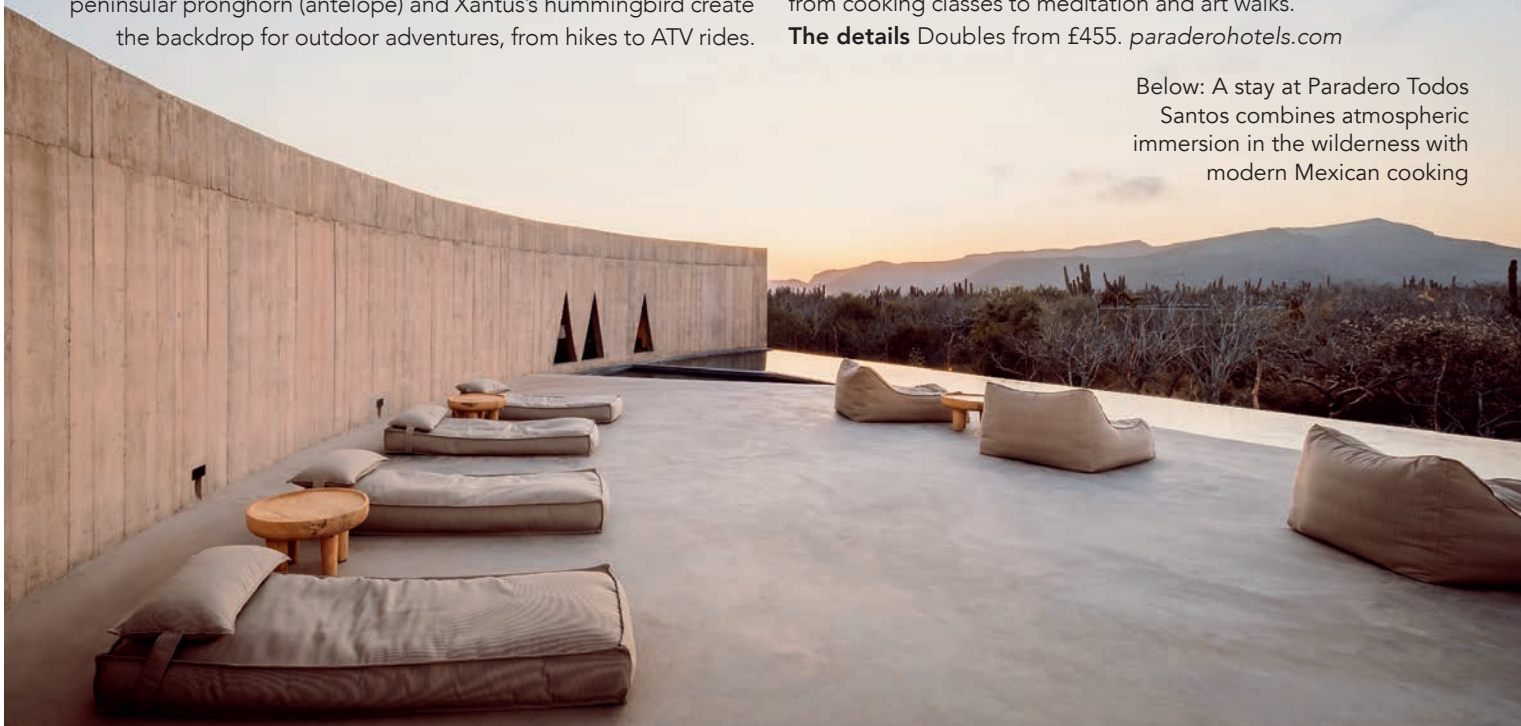
BAJA CALIFORNIA DESERT, MEXICO

Why go Recognised as one of Mexico's wildest and most intact ecoregions, and the only desert peninsula in the world with the climatic influence of two seas, the 77,700sq km Baja California Desert spans mountain ranges, volcanic rock formations, plains and coastal dunes across much of the Baja California Peninsula. Mangrove and lagoons border the Pacific coastline, with endemic flora and fauna: the spindly boojum tree, towering cardón cactus, peninsular pronghorn (antelope) and Xantus's hummingbird create the backdrop for outdoor adventures, from hikes to ATV rides.

The stay With its low-rise architecture and earthy tones, Paradero Todos Santos sits discreetly amid the arid landscape near Cerritos beach and El Pescadero village. Raw-concrete structures feature serene suites, some with roof decks, Tenoch restaurant brings the produce of land and sea into modern Mexican cooking, while the spa draws on ancient healing traditions. Experiences here are designed to connect you with the land, culture and spirit of Baja, from cooking classes to meditation and art walks.

The details Doubles from £455. paraderohotels.com

Below: A stay at Paradero Todos Santos combines atmospheric immersion in the wilderness with modern Mexican cooking



Photos by Elsa Young, Niels van Gijn, David Crookes; Unsplash; Tim | Productions; Cesar Bejar