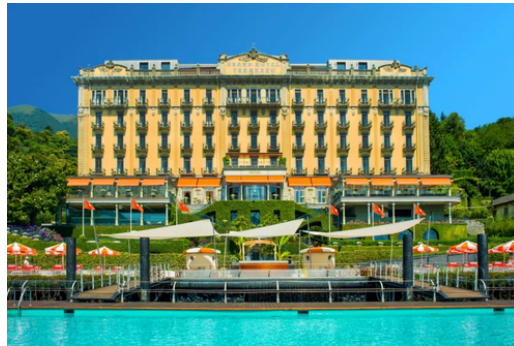


## Off the bucket list and on the itinerary: Luxury travellers are looking for immersive, adventurous ways to vacation



With its panoramic views, elegant dining halls and floating pool, the Grand Hotel Tremezzo has drawn discerning travellers to Lake Como since 1910. The family-owned art nouveau palace exudes all the historic charm and exceptional elegance of a bygone era. The Tremezzo has long topped many a bucket list. But now, three years from the start of the pandemic, they're finally booking tickets – in droves.

“It’s a jewel,” Wendy Davis, owner and luxury travel advisor at Zebrano Travel, a travel agency based in Toronto, says of the hotel. The Tremezzo closes each winter for refurbishments to maintain its pristine condition, and will re-open its doors on March 25 for this year’s season. “There isn’t a detail that is not to the top, top, top level of hospitality service. It’s stunning and exclusive. People feel special when they go there.”

But that’s not the only reason people are booking now.

“ Even for seasoned travellers, 2023 is the year where many are taking their first long trip after years in relative isolation and restriction, and they’re gravitating towards ‘jewels’

The pandemic has forced us to re-evaluate how we spend our time, and who we spend it with. For luxury travellers, that means finally taking that once-in-a-lifetime trip – such as a stay at the Grand Hotel Tremezzo. Eager to make up for lost time, travellers are enjoying planning epic and logistically complex getaways that they might normally put off. And with many able to work remotely, they’re extending their stays, too. For 2023, luxury travel is all about ticking off that bucket list – travelling farther, staying longer and having an adventure.

Even for seasoned travellers, 2023 is the year where many are taking their first long trip after years in relative isolation and restriction. And they’re gravitating towards what Davis calls “jewels”: family-owned boutique hotels with history, charm and glamour.

“When you take a look at these properties you get a sense of the special, the unique,” she says of extravagant hotels like the Grand Hotel Tremezzo, Chablé Maroma in the Riviera Maya and Kalesma Mykonosin Greece. These hotels are distinguished not only by their secluded locations and breathtaking beauty, but by their ultra-personalized service, which is of particular interest to those looking to feel taken care of every step of the way.



Small-ship cruising is another hot trend for luxury travellers this year. Aqua Expeditions’ Mekong itinerary takes guests through the Mekong Delta while offering a plunge pool, private cinema and Michelin-worthy menu on board.

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But there’s also booming interest in adventure travel: African safaris, exploring whole Caribbean islands and expedition cruises to remote locations like the Arctic, Galapagos and Antarctica.

“This trend speaks to our adventurous spirit as Canadians,” says Una O’Leary, the general manager of Canada for Virtuoso, a network of luxury travel advisors. “It’s not just that the destination is the most important thing,” says O’Leary. “The experience is also a very important element of their trips.” On the 11-day Platinum Botswana Safari from safari outfitter Lion World Travel, for example, travellers stay in small, luxury camps on Selinda Reserve, Makgadikgadi and the Okavango Delta, surrounded by nature and wildlife, and take evening rides to watch the sunset.

Luxury river cruises are proving popular with a new type of traveller looking for an immersive and unstructured way to explore a new destination. Aqua Expeditions, the award-winning luxury cruise ship company, facilitates trips from Peru to Indonesia. The Aqua Mekong, for example, cruises through the Mekong River in Cambodia and Vietnam. Each of the small ship's 20 suites boasts a panoramic view of landscape, and there's a private cinema, plunge pool and dining room with a menu dreamed up by a Michelin-starred chef. Personalized offshore excursions led by local guides include day trips to landmarks, temples and villages.

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The French company Ponant also offers the amenities and accommodations of a luxury cruise ship paired with an adventurous itinerary. Its expeditions take travellers deep into hard-to-reach locales like Antarctica and Seychelles.

Paulette Soloman, owner of The Travel Store, a Prince Edward Island-based luxury travel agency, says high-end travellers are craving an authentic experience. Authenticity may be the travel industry's de rigueur buzzword – a vague idea of an immersive cultural experience. But, Soloman says, “it's about getting to know a destination intimately. It might be in a high-end accommodation and spending a lot of time in a place. But it also might be an experiential adventure vacation... getting up close, hands on and doing things in a destination.”