

Exotic destinations in the world, as recommended by Krystal Tan of Blue Sky Escapes

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There are ancient travel agencies where we make a deliberate effort to stay away from, and then there are an emerging breed of travel experts, who are reshaping the negative stigma about putting your vacation in the hands of a stranger. The latter includes [Blue Sky Escapes](#), a boutique travel company which helps travellers unlock extraordinary experiences in some of the world's less travelled destinations. These are the places where the expertise of a professional could be exceptionally helpful, whether it be navigating around the area or communicating with the locals. Founder Krystal Tan shares her list of exotic experiences, for anyone who's game for an adventure.



Yunnan, China

There are still parts of China which are relatively quiet and remain untainted by the country's pursuit for world economic domination. There are 56 ethnic groups in China and close to half of these groups reside in Yunnan. As one would imagine, a journey to this diverse province — both in its indigenous mix of peoples and in its wild landscapes — is one steeped in discovery.

On a recent Blue Sky Escapes recon trip, we were the first foreigners to join Naxi falcon hunters practise the art of falcon hunting in the wild — German hunting dogs in tow to sniff out wild prey for the falcons. As we wove through lush foliage, mushroom picking along the way and witnessing local farmers at work, we then saw the majestic bird soaring above one moment then swooping down to pin a wild pheasant in the next.



Abruzzo, Italy

This central Italian region is a hidden gem east of Rome. I've stayed at 3-Michelin star Chef Niko Romito's gorgeous nine-room property, Casadonna Reale, which is a refurbished 16th century monastery surrounded by the beauty of The Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo. It's also where I had the most sumptuous breakfast in my life with all the bells and whistles, handmade nut milks, 'manteca' butter encased in a pulled-curd cheese and more. Other unforgettable experiences included hiking the national park with just a map and no clear signs for guidance or tourists in sight. If you have time to venture out for an hour and a half's drive from the hotel, the medieval 13th century Rocca Calascio fort is highly recommended. Go before lunch then tuck into some divine handmade gnocchi in a local restaurant, located just around the vicinity.



Mongolia

In this adventurous destination, more than 30% of the population are nomadic and migrate several times a year with their livestock and belongings. As we were keen to "live as the locals do", we found a local partner who matched us with two Mongolian Kazakh families to experience a true-to-life herd migration on horseback — the first foreigners to do so. This experience led us to expand to Mongolia in 2016.

If you're looking to step out of your comfort zone, you can opt to stay in a beautiful glamped-up ger with an ensuite bathroom and shower in true nomadic style. Another local experience could find you up in the Altai Mountains as guests of a Mongolian Kazakh eagle hunter and his family. Watching these golden birds of prey in action was a mesmerising experience.



Greenland

There's been a surge of travellers to Iceland for its magical landscapes and, in particular, the Northern Lights — but what better way to catch these lights than in Greenland, home to many aurora borealis observatories? Set near a UNESCO-protected Icefjord, my friends and I watched ice creak, crack and fall from the world's most active glaciers in the small town of Ilulissat some years ago.

In Kangerlussuaq, a small town with a population of around 500, we went on a dog sledding expedition in the Arctic Circle in freezing temperatures as low as -50°C. Decked out in at least eight layers of clothing — with the outermost layer made of seal skin — we had to leap off the sled and break into a mad sprint from time to time just to get the blood pumping so as to stay warm. Our host and guide was Inuit, and clad in white, fluffy pants made of polar bear skin. It was an incredible sight; think MC Hammer, but in the Arctic. It was passed down to him by his father who had personally hunted the polar bear.



Peru

Yes, there's Machu Picchu. But the topography of "richest country in the world" offers hikers and adventurers some of the best trails in the world. The Cordillera Huayhuash route was voted "The Second Most Beautiful Trek in The World" by National Geographic and you get a one-of-a-kind opportunity to camp in the Andes under the stars. There are also amazing sights like the grand Colca canyon and the colourful rainbow mountain of Ausangate, as well as tons of delicacies to lap up and culture to soak up.



To book a trip with Blue Sky Escapes, click here.