

Condé Nast Traveler

HOMES AWAY
HOT MARKETS,
REAL VALUES

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

DECEMBER 2005

FRANCE

A RIVIERA CITY REBORN

AUSTRALIA

OUTBACK CHIC

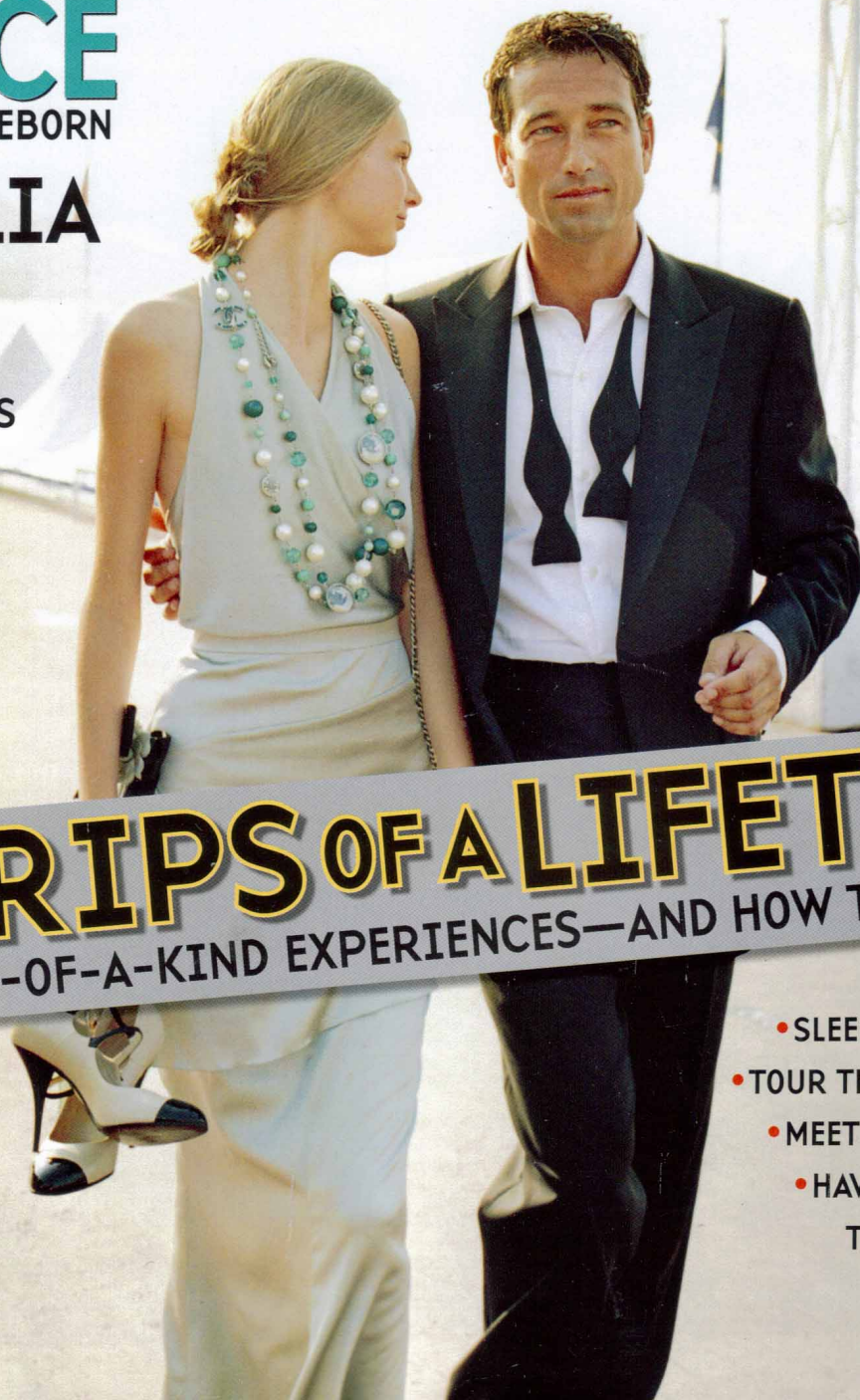
BRITAIN

EDGY NEW GARDENS

READERS' POLL

TOP SKI RESORTS

IN NORTH AMERICA



50 TRIPS OF A LIFETIME

ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCES—AND HOW TO GET THEM

- SLEEP IN A PYRAMID
- TOUR THE SECRET KREMLIN
- MEET THE DALAI LAMA
- HAVE THE VATICAN
TO YOURSELF

U.S.A. \$4.50
Foreign/Canada \$5.50



EXPERIENCES THAT ONLY INSIDERS CAN DELIVER

You can delve deeper into an unfamiliar culture when you are able to gain access to places, events, and people that are normally off-limits. Below are 50 examples of such extraordinary opportunities worldwide, ranging in price from \$80 to \$30,000. This list is not exhaustive: The very act of publicizing some rare opportunities offered by the most well-connected travel firms would burn the bridges that make them possible. Furthermore, many of the options described on these pages include special features that we are forbidden to divulge but that will surely enrich your trip. Because of the nature of such experiences, they are of course subject to change and even cancellation. Most cannot be booked à la carte but only as part of a larger itinerary. (Note that prices quoted are estimates for two people.)

Reported by Brook Wilkinson

AFRICA

BOTSWANA

Among Bushmen | 🏠 🍷 🎭

Meet the spiritual leaders of one of the last surviving groups of Bushmen—the oldest indigenous peoples on earth—who still practice aspects of their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle. During your time with the Bushmen, you'll watch a sacred heal-

ing-trance dance and also learn about their present-day struggles: While this particular community remains on its ancestral land near the Namibian border, the Botswanan government has forced some of those inside the Central Kalahari Game Reserve off their land and placed them in resettlement camps. Cost: \$3,600 for three nights. Source: Cherri Briggs,

Explore, Steamboat Springs, Colorado (888-596-6377; info@exploreafrica.net; exploreafrica.net).

In the Company of Lions | 🦁

2 Do research on lions and track leopards in the Kwando Reserve. Scientists with the African Predator Conservation Research Organization are studying the health and long-term

viability of these carnivore populations. Each night, you will help dart lions, collect DNA samples, and closely observe the immobilized animals. Cost: \$2,000 donation. Source: Cherri Briggs (see No. 1).

EGYPT

Museum After-hours | 🏠 🎭

3 Dr. Zahi Hawass, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, will personally escort you through the Egyptian Museum's pre-eminent collection of artifacts for two to three hours, presenting the kingdom's broad and complicated history in layperson's terms. If Cairo is your entry point to a larger Egypt itinerary, he can focus on relics from the regions you'll later visit. Cost: \$8,000. Source: Ryan Hilton, Admiral Travel, Sarasota, Florida (941-951-1801; africa@admiraltravel.com; admiraltravel.com).

KENYA

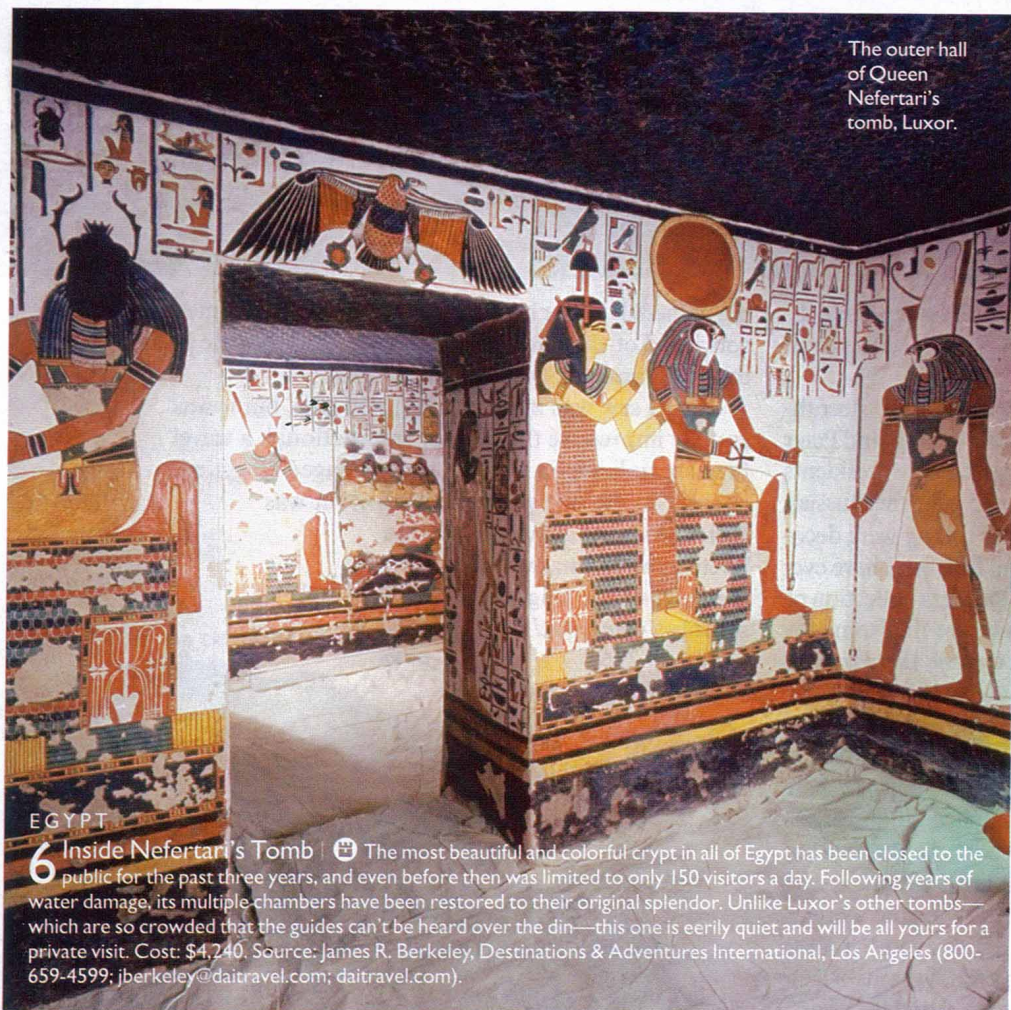
Masai-Style Barbecue | 🍷 🎭

4 Take part in an authentic meat roast on the Oloololo Escarpment in the Masai Mara. More than 300 warriors arrive from nearby villages to prepare and cook a cow and 11 goats during the day. At sunset, you'll gather around the campfire for the feast, followed by dancing and singing. Cost: \$1,500 in food contributions. Source: Linda Friedman, Custom Safaris, Bethesda, Maryland (866-530-1982; customsafaris@aol.com; customsafaris.com).

MADAGASCAR

Moving the Dead | 🏠

5 Attend a Famadihana, a Malagasy ceremony in which the deceased are moved between tombs on the anniversary of their death to reaffirm their link with living relatives. Not for the faint of heart, festivities in the village of Soatanana typically last two days and include the sacri-



The outer hall of Queen Nefertari's tomb, Luxor.

EGYPT

6 Inside Nefertari's Tomb | 🏠 The most beautiful and colorful crypt in all of Egypt has been closed to the public for the past three years, and even before then was limited to only 150 visitors a day. Following years of water damage, its multiple chambers have been restored to their original splendor. Unlike Luxor's other tombs—which are so crowded that the guides can't be heard over the din—this one is eerily quiet and will be all yours for a private visit. Cost: \$4,240. Source: James R. Berkeley, Destinations & Adventures International, Los Angeles (800-659-4599; jberkeley@daitravel.com; daitravel.com).

fice of a pig or cow. Cost: \$500–\$1,000 in sacrificial offerings. Source: Monique Rodriguez, Cortez Travel/Madagascar Expeditions, Solana Beach, California (800-854-1029; monique@cortez-usa.com; cortez-usa.com).

NIGER

Giraffes in the Sahara | 🏠

7 Examine ancient life-size giraffe carvings, the famously beautiful and realistic subjects of rock art dating back to 8000 B.C. Discovered in the barren landscape of the Sahara only six years ago, the 828 figures—representing cows, lions, and of course giraffes—are testimony to the region's former lushness. This extremely remote World Heritage Site is closed to the public. Cost: \$400. Source: Cherri Briggs (see No. 1).

SOUTH AFRICA

At Desmond Tutu's Table | 🍴

8 Join Archbishop Desmond Tutu for lunch in Cape Town. This high school teacher and priest was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for being "a unifying leader in the campaign to resolve the problem of apartheid in South Africa." During the meal, he'll discuss his past and ongoing human rights work worldwide. Cost: \$10,000 or more in a donation to one of Tutu's charities. Source: Mark Nolting, Africa Adventure Company, Fort Lauderdale (800-882-9453; noltingaac@aol.com; africa-adventure.com).

The Origins of Man | 🏠

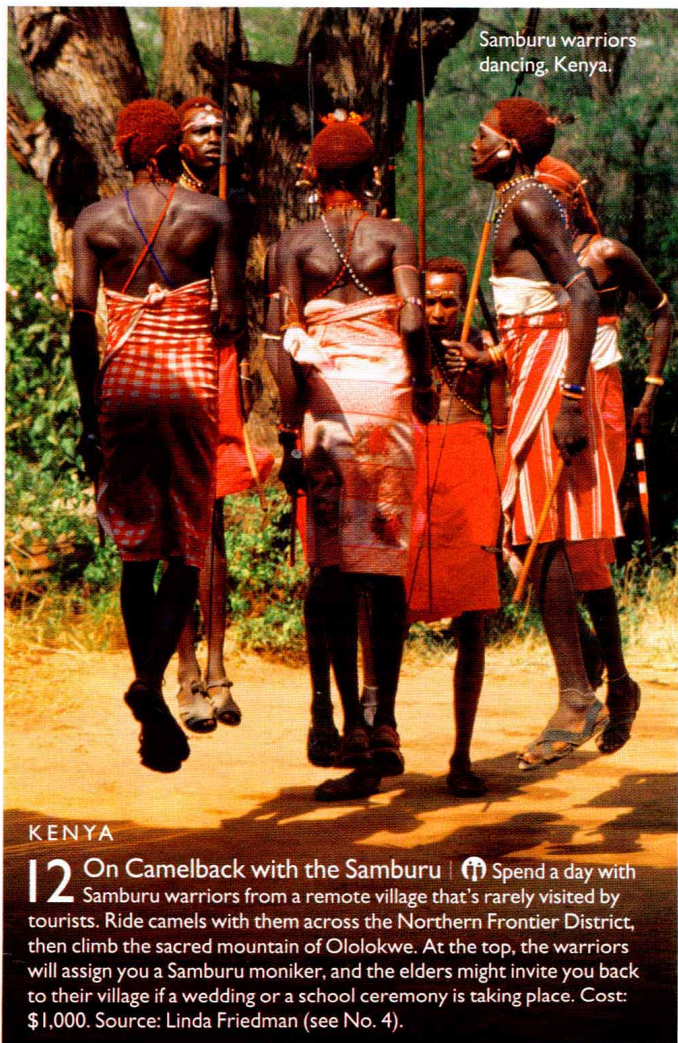
9 Explore an active dig in the Cradle of Humankind, a World Heritage Site 45 minutes from Johannesburg. At Drimolen, a section closed to the public, researchers have unearthed 79 hominid and prehomonid fossils, the third-richest find in southern Africa. A leading paleontologist will show you around the excavations. Cost: \$600. Source: Joel Zack, Heritage Tours, New York City (800-378-4555; joel@heritagetoursonline.com; heritagetoursonline.com).

A Zulu Welcome | 🏠

10 Meet the leader of the Zulu nation, King Goodwill Zwelithini kaBhekuzulu, who during his reign over KwaZulu-Natal has worked to revive the traditions and customs of his people, South Africa's largest ethnic group, and to promote AIDS education. The king, however, has drawn criticism for his lavish lifestyle. Cost: \$1,000. Source: Cherri Briggs (see No. 1).

Playing President | 🏠

Dine in Cape Town's Groote Schuur, the president's official residence, where Nelson Mandela lived and carried out negotiations with the apartheid regime. Current president Thabo Mbeki resides in a less formal building on the grounds. Before the meal, a curator will show you around the nineteenth-century Cape Dutch mansion. Cost: \$2,000. Source: Joel Zack (see No. 9).



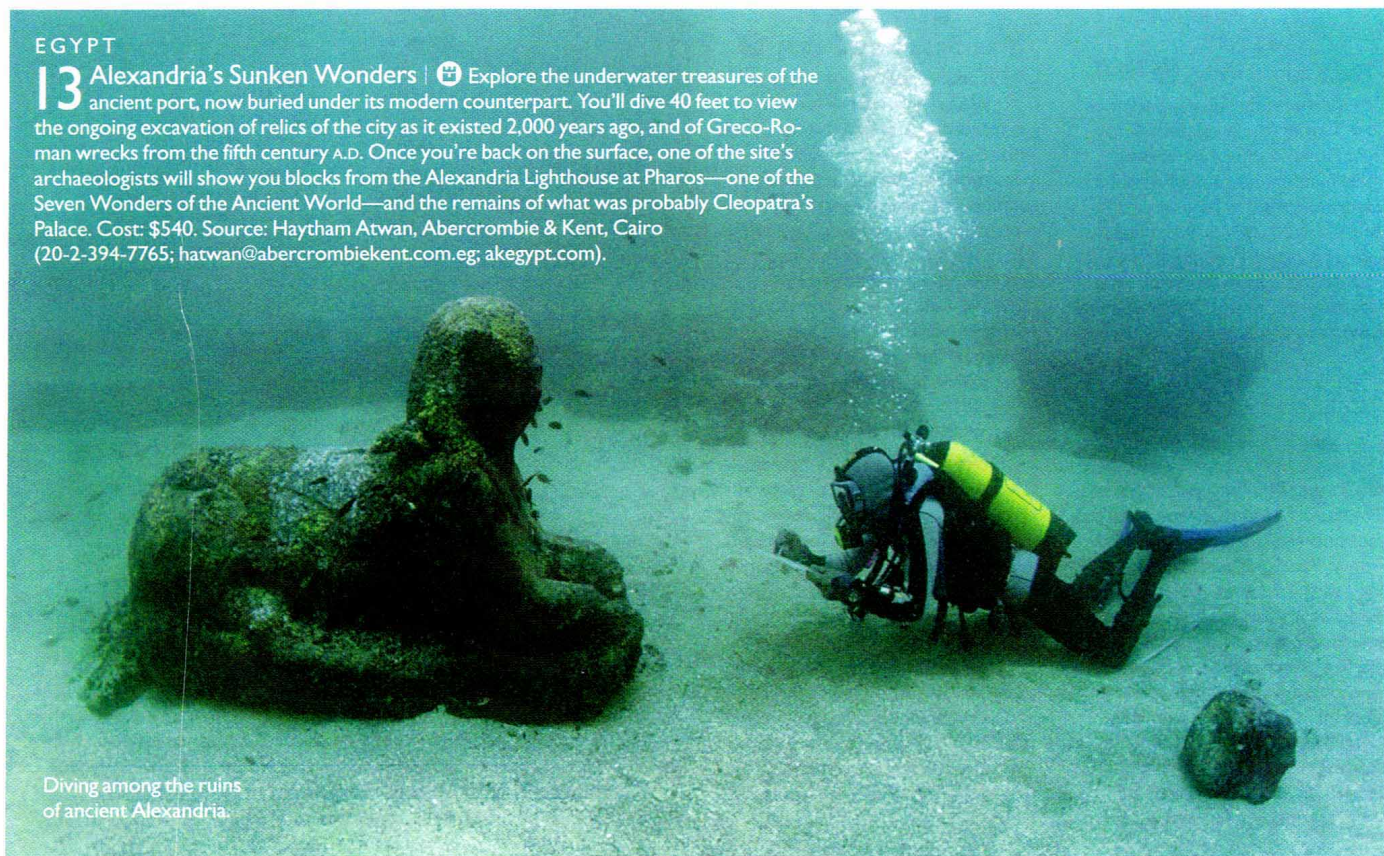
Samburu warriors dancing, Kenya.

KENYA

12 On Camelback with the Samburu | 🏠 Spend a day with Samburu warriors from a remote village that's rarely visited by tourists. Ride camels with them across the Northern Frontier District, then climb the sacred mountain of Ololokwe. At the top, the warriors will assign you a Samburu moniker, and the elders might invite you back to their village if a wedding or a school ceremony is taking place. Cost: \$1,000. Source: Linda Friedman (see No. 4).

EGYPT

13 Alexandria's Sunken Wonders | 🏠 Explore the underwater treasures of the ancient port, now buried under its modern counterpart. You'll dive 40 feet to view the ongoing excavation of relics of the city as it existed 2,000 years ago, and of Greco-Roman wrecks from the fifth century A.D. Once you're back on the surface, one of the site's archaeologists will show you blocks from the Alexandria Lighthouse at Pharos—one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World—and the remains of what was probably Cleopatra's Palace. Cost: \$540. Source: Haytham Atwan, Abercrombie & Kent, Cairo (20-2-394-7765; hatwan@abercrombiekent.com.eg; akeygypt.com).



Diving among the ruins of ancient Alexandria.