

**135** TRAVEL EXPERTS WHO CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE  
(Trust Us!)

# Condé Nast Traveler

HOW TO  
CHOOSE THE  
RIGHT  
CRUISE  
Pulled Extra

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

AUGUST 2010

## FANTASTIC GETAWAYS!

*Living the Dream in*

ITALY, INDIA,  
KENYA, EGYPT,  
AUSTRALIA,  
SOUTH AFRICA,  
MEXICO, AND  
THE AMERICAN  
DESERT

**Tree House Haven:**  
High above Lion Sands  
Private Game Reserve,  
South Africa

**GREAT  
DEALS NOW:**

Switzerland,  
San Francisco,  
Hong Kong

**PLUS:**

Cape Cod and The Islands

135  
World's Top  
Travel  
Specialists

# Perrin's People

Offering an unbeatable combination of expertise, access, and good value, these select travel consultants are the pros to turn to for your next big vacation

**YOU'RE PLANNING A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME TRIP.** You need everything to be perfect. You've scoured dozens of Web sites and travel forums, but you're still not sure what's the right itinerary or how to guarantee yourself flawless logistics and VIP treatment. You didn't like your last travel agent, but you need *someone* with the local expertise and clout to get you the rooms with the best views, the savviest English-speaking

guides, the free upgrades and special access. In short, you need a clever advocate who will produce the maximum experience for your travel dollar.

Sound like you? Then you're in luck, because the travel planners collected here represent the best blend of destination knowledge, insider connections, user-friendliness, and value for your dollar that I've found in more than two decades of scrutinizing the travel industry for this magazine. They have all been road-tested by *Condé Nast Traveler* readers, editors, or both. Of the more than 10,000 travel agents and tour operators who have tried to break onto this list since its inception 11 years ago, only 135 make the grade. Getting into this group is, statistically speaking, tougher than getting into Harvard. Staying on it is tougher still: It requires not only an absence of valid reader complaints but also ongoing positive evaluations from both readers and editors.

We invite you to peruse these assessments. Read on and you'll

find stories in the Tip boxes from some of our editors who have used these travel specialists for their personal trips. To hear directly from readers, go to [travelplanners.truth.travel](http://travelplanners.truth.travel), pull up the profile page of the specialist you want to learn more about, and click on the "Traveler Reviews" tab to read the critiques of that specialist posted by your fellow readers. You can also learn—online in the "FAQs and Essential Tips" section—exactly how these travel specialists were selected (excruciatingly carefully!) and when to contact one and when not to (hint: Do not go to these people merely for airline tickets!). We hope you'll want to post your own review once you return from a trip one of them has arranged. If you'd rather comment privately, or you'd like to nominate someone new for consideration, e-mail me at [perrinfeedback@cntraveler.com](mailto:perrinfeedback@cntraveler.com). And if you prefer not to hop from specialist to specialist but to use one travel planner for multiple trips, choose from those consultants marked with the  icon. Bon voyage! —Wendy Perrin

## MATCH YOURSELF TO THE PERFECT TRAVEL PLANNER

In a few clicks, learn more about our 135 recommended travel specialists (and 46 villa rental agents) with our new online tool—a soup-to-nuts guide to using the right travel pro

[HTTP://TRAVELPLANNERS.TRUTH.TRAVEL](http://TRAVELPLANNERS.TRUTH.TRAVEL)

The screenshot shows the 'truth.travel' website. At the top, there's a search bar and navigation tabs for 'Home', 'About Us', 'FAQs', 'Contact Us', 'Privacy Policy', 'Terms of Service', 'Sitemap', and 'Feedback'. Below the search bar, there are several filter sections: 'FIND A DESTINATION SPECIALTY' with dropdowns for Region and Country; 'FIND A CRUISE SPECIALIST' with a dropdown for Region or Interest; 'FIND A VILLA SPECIALIST' with a dropdown for Region; and 'MORE TRAVEL SPECIALISTS' with a dropdown for Interest. There are also sections for 'FAQs and Essential Tips' and 'Ask a Travel Question?'. The main content area features a large article titled 'Not Your Typical Travel Agent!' with a sub-headline 'World's 222 Most Trusted Women Begin to Arrive from the World and Vacation'. Below the article, there are several small images and text snippets. At the bottom, there are several small text boxes providing additional information and links.

This screenshot shows the search and filter interface on the 'truth.travel' website. It includes a search bar with a 'GO' button. Below it are several filter sections: 'FIND A DESTINATION SPECIALTY' with dropdowns for 'Select by Region' and 'Select by Country'; 'FIND A CRUISE SPECIALIST' with a dropdown for 'Select by Region or Interest'; 'FIND A VILLA SPECIALIST' with a dropdown for 'Select by Region'; and 'MORE TRAVEL SPECIALISTS' with a dropdown for 'Select by Interest'. There are also sections for 'FAQs and Essential Tips' and 'Ask a Travel Question?'. The 'FAQs and Essential Tips' section lists several questions and answers, such as 'How We Choose the Best Trip Planners', 'When to Use One, When Not To', 'FAQs for Working with a Travel Specialist', 'How We Choose the Best Villa Specialists', and '6 Questions to Ask Before Renting a Villa'. The 'Ask a Travel Question?' section includes a link to 'Ask the travel specialists your question here' and a link to 'Check for answers to your questions here'.

• Pull up more info on each travel specialist listed on the following pages.

• Find specialists for more destinations and activities than we could fit in print.

• Learn which trips to book through a travel specialist and which not to.

• Read the complete list of essential tips for working with these travel planners.

• Ask the experts your burning travel questions.

**PLUS**

• Read reviews posted by your fellow *Condé Nast Traveler* readers.

• Post your own user review after you return from a trip.



ful cultural exchanges such as volunteering at a school or health clinic. Her latest passion is gorilla tracking in Rwanda, which she's done seven times in four years (866-530-1982; linda@customsafaris.com; \$1,000\*).

**Nina Wennersten and Daniel Saperstein, Hippo Creek Safaris**

No single travel specialist on our list is more beloved by readers than Wennersten. It's her candor, attention to the most minute details, skill at choosing intimate camps and lodges, 24/7 accessibility, and delivery of the most rewarding experience (no matter how large or small her client's budget) that make readers feel they've found not just the right travel agent but their new best friend (888-930-9124; info@hippocreeksafaris.com; Kenya, \$800\*; Tanzania, \$1,190\*).

**SAFARIS: SOUTHERN AFRICA**  
**Cherri Briggs, Explore**

With offices in Botswana and Zambia, Briggs spends six to eight months of the year in Africa. Having served on the boards of several African conservation organizations, she applies her environmental ethics in choosing accommodations, from classic mobile tented safaris to luxe lodges, and fosters client participation in community and wildlife projects. She can have you viewing a trance dance with Bushmen in the Kalahari or lion stalking at night with veterinarians (888-596-6377; info@explorefafrica.net; \$800\*).

**Julian Harrison, Premier Tours**

Harrison, who co-authored Fodor's *African Safari*, is fluent in Afrikaans and Zulu. Born and raised in South Africa, where he worked part-time for six years as a ranger before moving to the United States, he can acquaint you with the region's lesser-known aspects, such as Bushman culture and their legacy of rock art. Harrison's strong ties with South African Airways allow him to get very competitive airfares (800-545-1910; julianh@premier-tours.com; South Africa, \$350\*; other countries, \$800\*).

**Ryan Hilton, Admiral Travel International**

A native Zimbabwean and former photo-safari guide in South Africa, Hilton has spent more than 600 days on safari. His familiarity with the terrain, guides, and animal behavior means he will set you up at camps with the best game viewing as well as provide expert advice for capturing the wildlife on film. If it's bragging rights you're after, he can also put you into small camps in South Africa's private game reserves (normally restricted to the reserve's owner) or arrange a private dinner in the cellar of a famous wine estate (941-951-1801; ryan@admiraltravel.com; \$500\*).

**Phoebe Weinberg, Greatways Travel**

Looking to combine game-rich lodges and camps with a few luxuriant days in Cape Town and the wine country? Weinberg's twice-yearly trips to Africa over several decades, coupled with her encyclopedic knowledge of the most elegant lodgings, mean she can pinpoint which property, room, ranger, and guide will best match a traveler's needs. She preps her clients with an inch-thick customized book filled with every aspect of their upcoming trip, from dining recommendations to photos of the staff at the camps (313-886-4710; phoebe@greatwaystravel.com; \$1,400\*).

**SAFARIS FOR FAMILIES**

**Mark Nolting, Africa Adventure Company**

The author of *Africa's Top Wildlife Countries and African Safari Journal*, Nolting spends six weeks a year on the continent. After ten safaris with his now 13- and 16-year-old sons, he knows exactly what works—and what doesn't—when taking children to Africa. If you're quibbling on Namibian sand dunes or playing soccer with Masai schoolchildren will keep your kids happy, he's your man (800-882-9453; safari@africanadventure.com; \$800\*).

# Pacific Nations

**AUSTRALIA, FIJI, AND PAPAUA NEW GUINEA**

**Lynette Wilson, Destination World**  
Wilson, who lives in Fiji and returns at least two weeks a year to her native Australia, will figure out how to

squeeze into a tight time frame every-thing on your wish list—Sydney, Uluru (Ayers Rock), the Great Barrier Reef, et al. In Fiji, she can get you access to archaeological sites that are normally off-limits or a private tour of a non-commercial black pearl farm (800-224-0220; world@silcom.com; \$275\*).

**AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

**Donna Thomas, New Zealand Travel**  
Thomas's knowledge of New Zealand shines through in the personalized road atlas she gives each traveler, with driving routes highlighted and notations on where to stop for hidden beaches, locally grown artisanal snacks, and gas. And, thanks to her more than 40 trips there, Kiwi travelers welcome her clients as family. Thomas also spends three weeks a

year in Australia, checking out everything from Sydney's finest private collection of Aboriginal art to the elusive wildlife of Tasmania with the island's best bush guide (800-367-5494; ntravel@aol.com or aussietrv@aol.com; \$150\*).

**FRENCH POLYNESIA AND THE COOK ISLANDS**

**Kleon Howe, The Art of Travel**  
Howe spent a year exploring these islands aboard a 44-foot sailboat, and he goes back for two weeks annually. He knows not only which overwater bungalows at which resorts have the best panoramic views but also the best dive locations, black pearl farms, deep-sea-fishing-boat captains, and B&Bs for the budget-minded (888-294-3598; kleon@theartoftravelonline.com; Cook Islands, \$600\*; French Polynesia, \$785\*).



# Asia

**BALI**

**Diane Embree, Michael's Travel Centre**  
Embree enjoys introducing travelers to the hidden Bali that so many visitors miss. Her clients can learn to play gamelan music with a village orchestra, undergo a purification ritual at a holy spring, create traditional masks in a workshop, or visit a village medicine man. She's also plugged in to the best hotels—both the well-known multinationals (Oberoi, Amanresorts) and the small local gems (805-484-9393; dianee@michaelttravel.com; \$300\*).

**BIUTAN**

**Brent Olson, Geographic Expeditions**  
Olson, who has been to Bhutan 45 times in the past 24 years and oversees trips there for 600 travelers annually, knows a broad cross section of Bhutanese, from villagers to high-ranking government officials to members of the royal family. He gets his clients into places that remain unknown to most tourists—in special cases, private festivals or prayer ceremonies (800-777-8183; brent@geox.com; \$1,200\*).

**CAMBODIA, LAOS, AND THAILAND**

**Andrea Ross, Journeys Within Tour Company**  
Ross lives in Cambodia six months of the year—when not in California she runs the Journeys Within B&B in Siem Reap with her husband—and can pepper Southeast Asian itineraries with philanthropic elements, enabling travelers to engage with the local commu-

nity. Her favorite secret destination? Battambang, Cambodia's little-visited second-largest city, which fell under Thai rule for more than a century but today has few crowds visiting its beautiful temples. Her affordable rates make her a great option for travelers on a budget (877-454-3672; andrea@journeys-within.com; \$200\*).

**CAMBODIA, LAOS, THAILAND, AND VIETNAM**

**G. W. "Sandy" Ferguson, Asia Desk**  
A former resident of Thailand who returns for two months every year and who speaks Thai and some Lao, Ferguson is known for his fabulous hand-picked guides and savvy hotel choices. In Cambodia he can arrange for you to join the monks of a mountaintop temple for their pre-dawn prayers (followed by a gourmet picnic breakfast), and in Vietnam he can introduce you to one of the elders from Cu Chi, the village outside Saigon that infamously withstood repeated attacks from the U.S. Army during the war (800-667-4993; sandy@asiadesk.net; \$400\*; 12-night minimum).

**CHINA**

**Gerald Hatherly, Abercrombie & Kent**  
There are many ways a traveler can get utterly lost in China. But with Hong Kong-based Hatherly, who is fluent in Mandarin and spends 150 days a year traveling throughout the country, you can rest easy. He knows the best ways to negotiate a megalopolis like Beijing or Shanghai, and he's equally expert at leading guests off the beaten track and into lesser-known areas such as the

rice terraces of Longsheng or the bamboo forests of Zhejiang, where the raw beauty of fast-vanishing rural China can still be found (852-2865-7818; hatherly@abercrombiekent.com; \$400\*).

**Mei Zhang, WildChina**

Zhang wants to show you the "authentic China," beyond anything you'll find in guidebooks, and—as a Yunnan Province native, Harvard MBA, and former consultant for the Nature Conservancy—she has a vast network of in-country experts in nearly every field that can make this happen... and get you farther off the beaten path than anyone else. Her cultural connections run deepest in southwest China—Yunnan, Szechuan, and Guizhou provinces—where you might find yourself having tea with a shaman, catching a private Naxi music concert at the home of the village head, or camping in luxury mobile tents on the Tibetan Plateau (301-652-8800; mei.zhang@wildchina.com; \$400\*).

**INDIA**

**Victor Biswas, International Ventures and Travel**  
Looking for luxury and old-world charm? Biswas, a native of India who returns for at least three weeks a year, fills his itineraries with the sort of gracious touches—hard-to-book rooms in restored palace hotels or a meeting with Jaipur's top jeweler—that are available only through his vast countrywide network of connections (212-947-7075; victor@ivat.com; \$800\*).

**Bertie and Victoria Dyer, India Beat**

Flexible, energetic, and dead honest, the Dyers are Brits based in Jaipur who are enjoying a long love affair with India and who have a particular knowledge of Rajasthan, the temple- and art-rich region in the country's north. The duo will appeal most to those who want to get outside the luxury hotel bubble and experience more of the real India. In Jaipur, Victoria leads clients on a shopper's dream tour, into the local gem markets and through the city's best jewelry and silk boutiques (91-141-651-9797; bertie@indiabeat.co.uk; \$400\*).

**INDIA, NEPAL, SRI LANKA, AND TIBET**

**Sanjay Savana, Destination Himalaya**  
An army brat who grew up cross-countrying the Subcontinent, Savana speaks both Hindi and Nepali. He designs vibrant



adventure-packed itineraries that will appeal to a would-be Indiana Jones, filled as they are with under-the-radar destinations and unusual experiences (white-water rafting in Tibet, touring an elephant orphanage in Sri Lanka). But he also excels at crafting more traditional luxury trips (800-694-6342; [rajay@destinationhimalaya.net](mailto:rajay@destinationhimalaya.net); India, \$700\*; Nepal and Sri Lanka, \$450\*; Tibet, \$600\*).

#### JAPAN

##### Nancy Craft, *Esprit Travel & Tours*

For seven years Craft lived in Japan, where she studied weaving and dyeing, and her passion for these disciplines is evident in her art and culture tours. Clients get to meet master craftsmen such as silk weavers, textile artisans, and ceramists. She can also arrange private visits to Kyoto temples and is savvy about where to splurge. In Tokyo, for instance, she sometimes suggests that clients forgo splashier accommodations for a well-located business hotel (this can mean significant savings) and then stay at a special ryokan as a treat (800-377-7481; [nancy@esprittravel.com](mailto:nancy@esprittravel.com); \$650\*).

#### MALDIVES

##### Lindsay Wallace, *Linara Travel*

Booking a less-than-great hotel doesn't have to spoil your vacation—unless your vacation is in the Maldives, where a bad hotel equals a bad trip. Wallace, who has visited nearly every property in the Maldives, will match you to the right one while making sure your stay is perfect: His pull with resort managers, concierges, *maitre d's*, sommeliers, spa directors, room butlers, and dive masters translates into special savings and perks for clients. From advantageous room locations to desert-island excursions (800-335-6033; [lindsay@linaratravel.com](mailto:lindsay@linaratravel.com); \$500\*).

#### MONGOLIA

##### Jalsa Urubshurov, *Nomadic Expeditions*

Urubshurov has an office in Ulaanbaatar, speaks two Mongolian dialects, and has an enthusiasm for his ancestral homeland that is infectious. He recommends traveling within the country by four-wheel drive and horse rather than by air—so as to better appreciate the vast, unspoiled landscapes—and stopping en route to meet with nomadic families and experience their natural warmth. Travelers stay in a combination of accommodations: hotels, *gers* (traditional Mongolian tents), and the eco-friendly Three Camel Lodge in the Gobi Desert (800-998-6634; [jalsa@nomadicexpeditions.com](mailto:jalsa@nomadicexpeditions.com); \$655\*).

#### MYANMAR

##### William Myatwanna, *Good News Travel*

When *Lonely Planet* writers want to update their guide to Myanmar, the first call they make is to Yangon-based Myatwanna. Born in Yangon and educated in Europe, he is your key to this famously reclusive country. Not only does Myatwanna arrange for drivers, translators, river cruises, mountain treks, bungalows at beachfront resorts, private tours of hill-tribe villages, and hot-air-balloon rides above the ancient ruins of Bagan but he also keeps clients apprised of the latest news and trouble spots (951-375-050; [goodnewstravel@gmail.com](mailto:goodnewstravel@gmail.com); \$600\*).

#### NEPAL

##### Antonia Neubauer, *Myths and Mountains*

Neubauer, who spends at least a month in Nepal each year, is dedicated to making a positive contribution to the countries in which her company operates. Its non-profit partner, READ Global, has built 45 library/community centers throughout Nepal (its first center was the winner of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's 2006 Access to Learning Award). Neubauer's extensive network of friends throughout Nepal go out of their way to help her clients and make possible intimate experiences of the local culture such as an audience with a "living virgin goddess," a visit to a *thangka* (silk painting) workshop, or a trek to Everest Base Camp (800-670-6984; [toni@mythsandmountains.com](mailto:toni@mythsandmountains.com); \$300\*).

**FIND MORE SPECIALISTS FOR CHINA, THE CAUCASUS, GEORGIA, INDIA, KYRGYZSTAN, PAKISTAN, TURKMENISTAN, NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA, TIBET, AND FAMILY TRAVEL IN ASIA AT [travelplanners.truthtravel.com](http://travelplanners.truthtravel.com).**

\* Recommended for other destinations too

Prices represent the minimum—per day for two people—that you should expect to pay. The more you spend, the more the travel specialist can embellish your trip with added value.

## CAPE COD

(Continued from page 98) rather raucous feast of smoked mussels and sushi from Martha's Vineyard, smoked bluefish and bread from Nantucket, cheese from Chatham, and ripe tomatoes, cucumbers, and basil from my garden. Our towels and swimsuits, pinned to the railing of the boat, flap in the balmy night air.

What's interesting is how far away we feel—unmoored and loose, creative and energized—even though we are just twenty or thirty miles from home. This is the quality that the Cape seems to have, an ad hoc sense of intimacy that comes with remoteness.

In a place like this, you feel more connected to a historical past than the present. The Wampanoag tribes settled here thousands of years ago, before the end of the last ice age. In 1602, an English explorer, Bartholomew Gosnold, arrived—a man so adept at naming places that many of them stuck: Martha's Vineyard, Cape Cod, the Elizabeth Islands. Two years later, Samuel de Champlain appeared, a twenty-four-year-old Frenchman who was driven away by Indians on Nauset Beach. The *Mayflower* and its pilgrims were blown off course by winter storms on their way to the Hudson and arrived in Provincetown, the outermost tip of the Cape, before sailing around to nearby Plymouth in the winter of 1620.

White settlements rose, one by one. Ports and fishing industries—whaling, shellfishing, saltworks—were established near waterways and harbors. Villages grew slowly and distinctly, each with its own feeling, history, culture, and demographic. But almost

more than any of these, the Cape and its islands share a profound sense of isolation, of remove, of distance that lends itself to reflection. As Henry David Thoreau wrote of the outer beach of Nauset, "A man may stand there and put all America behind him."

The next day we sail on, passing Aquinnah—or Gay Head, as it used to be known—on our way toward the Elizabeth Islands, just eight miles across Vineyard Sound. The main sail is full and the cool, dry wind draws us forward to Cuttyhunk. We can't help but look back, mesmerized by the pale golden cliffs of Aquinnah rising dramatically from the sea. The cliffs are far taller than anything else on the Cape and far older (one hundred million years old)—a continental shelf that broke free.

**I**'D HEARD A LOT ABOUT CUTTYHUNK Island over the years, but none of it fit together. Lore has it that William Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* after hearing his friend Bartholomew Gosnold describe a winter storm he'd seen on Cuttyhunk. Friends and sailors had described the island to me as a throwback, a place lost in time. It was how the Cape "used to be."

There is no private telephone service on Cuttyhunk, no airfield for private jets. Even at the height of summer, the small ferry arrives from New Bedford just twice a day. A one-room schoolhouse accommodates the year-round population of fifty. So we are surprised when, arriving just before sunset, the harbor master's voice on our VHF marine radio tells us that the marina is full.

Gunkholers have gathered in force—in

## Word Trips

Making Your Connections

BY EMILY COX AND HENRY RATHVON

Between each pair of locations at right is a blank that connects them. Place a letter in the blank to spell a word of at least seven letters that reads across the two locations. For example, placing the letter *B* between BELFAST and ALLENTOWN enables you to spell FASTBALL. Fill in all 13 blanks and the new letters will spell the puzzle's final answer—a word whose components evoke trucks and trains.

MAV'S PUZZLE ANSWER: Go to page 124.

1. YOKOHAMA \_\_ CARACAS
2. BEIRUT \_\_ AMSTERDAM
3. ACAPULCO \_\_ MANDALAY
4. ABIDJAN \_\_ TORONTO
5. CASPER \_\_ ALEXANDRIA
6. PARIS \_\_ TOPEKA
7. LUANDA \_\_ TEL AVIV
8. DARWIN \_\_ BAGHDAD
9. ZAGREB \_\_ KINGSTON
10. KARACHI \_\_ KENOSHA
11. ABU DHABI \_\_ ATLANTA
12. BUCHAREST \_\_ READING
13. YAOUNDE \_\_ SEATTLE

Enter online for a chance to win a spa weekend for two!

Enter your answer online at [cntraveler.com/wordtrips/awg](http://cntraveler.com/wordtrips/awg). No purchase necessary. Full rules and entry form available online at this address. All correct answers will be included in a drawing for the annual prize: a spa resort weekend for two (approximate retail value, \$2,500). Entries must be received by 11:59 p.m. E.T. on August 31, 2010, when the contest ends. Contest open to legal residents of the United States and Canada (excluding Quebec) age 18 and older. Odds of winning depend on the number of correct entries received. Answer will be published in the November issue. Sponsored by Condé Nast Traveler, 4 Times Square, New York, New York 10036.