

Nature in All Its Glory

10 Unforgettable Off-Grid Retreats, Group Trips, and Expeditions

by Team Fathom



Reindeer Expedition with Intrepid in Siberia. Photo courtesy of Reindeer Expedition with Intrepid.

There's off-grid luxury, and then there's the thrilling, but potentially bumpy ride navigating out of your comfort zone and into rustic environs. While researching [The World's 10 Best Off-the-Grid Hotels for Total Digital Detox](#) for our Fathom Travel Awards, we found wild treks, adventures, and group trips that require a little more muscle, sweat, and spontaneity to pull off. These are not the kind of adventures you want to bring your high-maintenance pal on, since there will be physical labor, composting toilets, and the occasional cold shower. But the memories, landscapes, and cultural exchanges are breathtaking and unforgettable.

Join a Russian Reindeer Expedition

Where: Russia and Siberia

What's to love: The veteran global adventure company Intrepid offers an off-beat 15-day adventure not for the faint of heart or mind. The small group trip of four to twelve people begins in St. Petersburg with a WiFi-free, 22-hour train ride, bus adventure, and Russian six-wheeled amphibious all-terrain vehicle joyride to reach well beyond the Arctic Circle, to the Yamal Peninsula, where travelers are welcomed into a tribe of nomadic reindeer herders called the Nenets. Reindeer sledding, fishing, and snowmobiling on the frozen tundra ensues. Not to mention camaraderie with the nomads and learning life-saving tricks, like how to stay warm in -50°F weather.

Good to know: No flushing toilets, no cell service, and no WiFi. Roughing it might be an understatement.

Slumber in a Field of Lightning

Where: New Mexico

What's to love: Life imitates art in this off-the-grid installation in a mysterious desert location in New Mexico's Catron County, 7,200-feet above sea level. A group of six are picked up at a designated place and driven to a cabin in an undisclosed location to take part in an overnight experience of Land Art by the American sculptor Walter De Maria. *The Lighting Field* consists of 400 polished stainless steel poles stretched across the high desert, a grid measuring one mile by one kilometer. Visitors are encouraged to walk around the field, especially during sunset and sunrise, whether there's a lighting storm or not, to take in the mind-altering effect of the sun's rays on the metal poles and the charred earth from lightning strikes. Back at the cabin, simple meals and lodging are provided, along with books and a shortwave radio (in case of emergencies). No other devices allowed.

Good to know: Visiting slots have filled up quickly since the launch of the work in 1977.

Book early and pack sturdy shoes.

Read more on Fathom: [A Sleepover Art Installation in a Field of Lightning](#)



The Ranch Malibu. Photo Courtesy of The Ranch Malibu.

Go Back to Ground Zero at The Ranch at Live Oak

Where: Malibu, California

What's to love: Go back to hardcore basics in pursuit of a healthy mind, body, and soul. The sprawling 1920s hacienda-style estate, a former boys' summer camp, sits on 100-plus acres and has been transformed into fourteen well-appointed private cabins with common areas, indoor and outdoor dining areas, two workout facilities, and a year-round organic farm. No cell service or WiFi – this is an unplugged bootcamp for personal excavation. Plus, you'll need to pay attention to your hydration needs while taking a twelve-mile hike or holding a sunrise *chaturanga*. Depending on which [program](#) you opt into, days will be filled with fitness regimes, wellness support, and a monastic meal plan.

Good to know: Sustainability is key in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and whether you visit the ranch for four, seven, or ten days, the journey begins 30 days prior with a series of suggested exercises, dietary restrictions, and living assignments to prepare you for the mega detoxing on site.

Read more on Fathom: [A Cool Ranch in Malibu](#)

Get Cozy in a Private Island Yurt

Where: Nova Scotia, Canada

What's to love: Just off the coast of Blue Rocks fishing village, near Lunenburg on the South Shore of Nova Scotia, is a small private island ready to welcome adventurers looking to get on the water. The Private Island Yurt for Two adventure from Pleasant Paddling features guided kayaking to a seal colony and hidden inlets perfect for snorkeling, a biking trek, and picnic lunch, followed by an overnight private island stay in a hand-crafted yurt with a skylight for stargazing. The excursion also includes a locally-sourced dinner of mussels and charcuterie.

Good to know: As you'll be totally immersed in the surrounding nature, the experience depends heavily on the elements. Fortunately, if weather does not permit, you'll be refunded completely.

Spend the Night in a Skybed in the Okavango Delta

Where: Khwai Private Reserve, Botswana

What's to love: Two lodges in the middle of the African wilderness can be combined for a multi-night sleeping adventure through the safari collection Natural Selection. Skybeds are three-story rustic platforms in the trees overlooking a watering hole frequented by tsessebes, wildebeest, and elephants. After a night or two spent close to the stars, travelers can move to sister camp [Sable Alley](#), a more luxurious (but no more technologically connected) lagoonside tented accommodation with an Afro-chic indoor seating area, double bed, and writing desk for recording animal sightings and feelings of awe.



Paddle to Your Heart's Content in a Frozen Ocean Canoe Trek

Where: Kejimikujik National Park, Canada

What's to love: A real get-your-hands-dirty camping experience. Three days on canoes and at different campsites allow travelers to experience the wilderness of eastern Canada's maritime province. Paddlers are given a tent, camping equipment, easy-to-make dishes, and freshly ground coffee each morning. Days are spent moving from picturesque lakes and rivers that connect lovely campsites, a neat experience for adventurous families and groups of friends.

Good to know: Trips start on Mondays and Fridays exclusively. The experience is only for those who are up to and capable of physical activity for multiple hours.

Where: Greenland

What's to love: Natural Habitat Adventure's deluxe safari-style camp near the edge of the Greenland ice sheet is one of the most isolated places on Earth. Up to 12 guests experience remote areas that a very few people have ever seen. The area, once inaccessible except by kayak, is now the only luxury basecamp in Greenland. Feel the cool breeze off massive icebergs and peel your eyes for whale sightings. Rub elbows with local Inuits in their fishing villages. Evening lectures are presented Arctic naturalists who double as guides. As there's no WiFi or cell service, you'll have to save sharing adventures and pictures for when you get home.

Good to know: Environmental sustainability is a highly important aspect of traveling through the rapidly changing Arctic and other habitats being threatened by climate change. The emissions from the trip are 100-percent carbon-offset by Natural Habitat, the world's first carbon-neutral travel company.

Take a Kimberly Coast Cruise with the Pioneers

Where: Papua New Guinea, The Kimberley

What's to love: Coral Expedition's Australian-flagged fleet of three rugged ships were purpose-built for exploration. The Kimberly coastal cruise requires a minimum of ten nights and brings passengers on a full tour of the ancient, hard-to-access region from April through September. Expect waterfalls, ancient art sites, and expert interpretation of landscape, nature, wildlife, and history. Covering over 400,000 square kilometers, the land is only home to 30,000 people, making it one of the largest areas of unfettered wilderness in the world.

Good to know: This is much more intimate than a standard cruise ship, which is part of the charm. There are four styles of ship, all varying slightly in shape and size. The largest accommodates 120 guests (Coral adventurer) and the smallest only 44 (Coral Expeditions II).

Walk on the Wild Side in Zambia

Where: South Luangwa National Park, Zambia

What's to love: An early pioneer of the guided walking safari, Robin Pope has been leading small groups into the African wilderness for decades. On this five-night trek, guests cover about six miles on foot per day along the Mupamadzi River, with guides setting up a full-service, portable camp at each day's end. Travelers pad lightly in search of elephants, leopards, buffalo, rare birds, and giraffes with local guides skilled in navigating on foot.

Good to know: Meals (and wine) are provided on portable dining tables with tablecloths. Full bedding is set up under walk-in tents lit by lanterns and the moon. The experience is luxurious despite being totally cut off from technology and indoor shower. The shower is under a tree and the toilet, for those wondering, is a bush loo with a wooden throne.



Indulge in Your Blue Period in Verana

Where: Verana, Yelapa, Mexico

What's to love: Maybe you just need a little home to call your own for a few days. After a boat ride and a hike, you can throw open the windows to Blue House, a private waterfront house on the grounds of the secluded boutique hotel [Verana](#). Three bedrooms sleep six: plenty of company to keep you from being lonely without your laptop. A private pool overlooks the water, terraces allow for al fresco hammock hanging, and interiors come in several delightful shades of blue. Upon request, your mini fridge can be stocked with fruit, milk, and drinks.

Good to know: There is no WiFi, the phone signal is poor, and there are no alarm clocks. To reach a workable phone, you'll need to hike up the mountain.