

## For \$80,000 a week, you can stay at the most exclusive hotel on Earth — in Antarctica

Laura Begley Bloom, Special to CNBC | 8:30 AM ET Wed, 18 Oct 2017



"Arriving at [White Desert Antarctica](#) is like arriving nowhere else on the planet," says Robyn Woodhead, co-founder of the luxury lodge that sits at the end of the Earth.

After the [private jet](#) touches down on a blue-ice landing strip, its doors open and you're hit with sub-zero temperatures. The cold can take your breath away, Robyn tells [CNBC Make It](#).

"It's sensory overload," she says. "Pure white as far as the eye can see."

A six-wheel-drive truck outfitted for the elements arrives to take 12 guests to their home for the week: Whichaway Camp, a cluster of sand-colored pods perched over the rugged terrain.

"From a distance, our camp looks like Mars or a lunar camp," says Robyn.

Inside, fur throws are draped over mid-century modern chairs in a dining room that's straight out of "Game of Thrones." Champagne flows freely, she says.

White Desert is the brainchild of Robyn and her husband, Patrick Woodhead, both polar explorers who sunk their life savings into creating one of the most dramatic — and exclusive — luxury camps on the planet.

A week-long stay here costs upwards of [68,000 euros](#) (\$80,000) per person, and guests have included Prince Harry and former astronaut Buzz Aldrin.

Intrepid travelers can also book the ultimate [day trip](#) to White Desert for a cool \$10,000 a person, which includes the five-and-a-half-hour flights to and from Cape Town and eight hours on the ground in Antarctica.

It's a new breed of luxury travel.

"People are bored of luxury hotel stays in similar surroundings," says Robyn, who was the first South African woman to visit both the South and North Poles. Today, travelers are "searching for something out of the ordinary that no one has experienced before," she says.



Source: White Desert

Scenes from White Desert luxury camp in Antarctica

"They are searching for moments that are totally unattainable in normal life."

While more than [30,000](#) travelers visit the periphery of Antarctica by cruise a year, only about [300](#) venture into the interior of this last great wilderness, partly because it's so difficult to get to, partly because of the cost.

White Desert hosts about 100 visitors a year, according to Robyn, giving those lucky few guests a chance to explore neon-blue ice tunnels, get an up-close look at a colony of 6,000 emperor penguins, visit the South Pole and experience the real Antarctica.



Elite Traveler magazine named White Desert one of the top 50 adventures of 2017. And Simon Mayle, exhibition director of International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM), which hosts luxury travel conferences around the globe, says that going to a place like White Desert is the ultimate in bragging rights.

"You'd have to be on a social media detox not to brag about a place like this," says Mayle.

The Woodheads got the idea for White Desert after Patrick went skiing across Antarctica on an 80-day expedition in 2003.

"I fell in love with the sheer vastness of the continent," says Patrick, an author of adventure novels who as a kid was fascinated by famed British explorer Ernest Shackleton's accounts of traveling the seventh continent.

Robyn describes their original idea as "a really crazy one — to build a tented camp at the bottom of the world."



At first, they hosted groups of travelers in luxury tents, but soon realized they needed to fuse old-world opulence with new-world technology for the camp to survive the harsh winds and frigid temperatures of the coldest place on Earth. The environmentally friendly fiberglass pods opened in 2012 and are powered by solar and wind energy. Since Antarctica is in complete darkness most of the year, White Desert only operates expeditions from November to the end of January.

One well-traveled guest, Tricia Landry, went in December 2015 and says it was beyond a bucket-list trip.

"People have bucket lists, but my brother and I have a f--- it list," says the Manhattan Beach-based finance exec, who recently returned from Oman, Dubai and the Seychelles. "You say: 'F--- it, let's do it.' What are you going to do, bring the money with you when you die?"

Landry says it was worth every penny.



"It's the trip that sticks with me the most, and I've been to some of the deepest interiors of the Earth," she says. "Everything I saw was something that I had never experienced before — the colors, the expansiveness of the polar plateau. I've seen glaciers, but this is something you can't comprehend."

Silversea Cruises recently added White Desert to its new Couture Collection, a line of ultra-luxury expeditions that can be combined with a sailing. Conrad Combrink, VP of product development expeditions and experiences, says that extreme adventure like this is a growing trend among the affluent set.

"Although people still like to have material goods, regardless of how wealthy one is, the trend is toward measuring wealth in experiences," says Combrink, who has been to Antarctica 65 times.

"There is also something inherently human about the need to explore, push boundaries and to experience the extraordinary."