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THE MYSTERY OF THE



**No one knows who
killed Barry and Honey
Sherman—or why**

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MURDERED BILLIONAIRES



\$5,000 for a Night In... a Tent?

Travelers are paying serious cash to trade walls for canvas. *By Nikki Ekstein*



At some point in the mid-2010s, “glamping” became a four-letter word.

A sudden boom in upscale tented accommodations—which ultimately felt neither glamorous nor like camping—went bust just as quickly. But now, hoteliers around the globe are once again venturing beyond brick-and-mortar walls for safari-style tents, many with fireplaces, wood floors, and free-standing bathrooms with tubs.

For travelers, the experience offers novelty, digital disconnection, and vacations that are at once largely authentic and Instagrammable. They can interact with rescued elephants in northern Thailand at Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle or hot air balloon above the Rocky Mountains from the Resort at Paws Up in Montana.

“Kids love it—it’s great for multi-generational trips,” says Jack Ezon, president of Ovation Vacations, a luxury travel agency. “It’s a completely different experience.” Clients come to him having tented properties on their bucket lists or simply looking for something different and outdoorsy.

The concept has become so high-end, glamping no longer does it justice.

“We’ve seen some of our tents going for \$5,000 a night,” says Luca Franco, founder of Luxury Frontiers, a soup-to-nuts company that specializes in developing ultra-high-end tented camps such as Abu Camp and Eagle Island Lodge in Botswana. Among his upcoming projects: a private-island resort in the Maldives and a tented village in Utah. At all, guests pay a premium to camp out under the stars. With butler service.

When Franco started in 2011, the

market was concentrated in Africa’s game parks. “Fifty to 70 percent of the guests at the top-tier safari lodges in Africa were coming from the U.S.,” he says, signaling to him that the safari-style concept might have legs in other pristine destinations.

Franco and his contemporaries tapped into burgeoning demand for eco-sensitive and off-the-grid vacations by thinking of these projects as conduits for unique excursions. “We flip the concept of designing the box and filling it with activities,” he says. “Instead, we design the activities first and then design the box around that.”

At the One&Only Mandarin in Riviera Nayarit, Mexico, coming in 2020, guests will be able to ride horses at sunset on a white, powdery beach. On the border of Cambodia’s Cardamom National Park at Shinta Mani Wild, designed by hotelier





Clockwise from top: Wild Coast Tented Lodge in Sri Lanka; Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle in northern Thailand; Sierra Escape in New South Wales, Australia; Capella Ubud in Bali



Bill Bensley, guests will be able to eat at a restaurant tucked under a waterfall and zip line into the resort. Endangered leopards are the draw at Wild Coast Tented Lodge in Sri Lanka. Similarly, when it opens in fall 2019, Nayara Tented Camp in Costa Rica will offer budding conservationists an up-close look at the country's dwindling sloth population.

"I grew up as a kid going camping," says Leo Ghitis, Nayara's owner. "At this stage in our lives, we like the nostalgia of camping but with all the conveniences and luxuries." At his property, that means plunge pools fed by hot springs.

According to Franco, hoteliers who invest in tented projects can expect to generate 20 percent to 40 percent more in revenue than traditional six-star counterparts. Simon Dornan, general manager of the recently opened Capella Ubud, Bali's first tented camp, agrees. Not just because tents can command higher nightly rates, he says, but because the type of traveler they attract generally spends more on excursions, spa treatments, and cultural exchanges—all high-margin offerings for hoteliers. Although tents often take longer to construct, costs can be as much as 50 percent lower than those for standard hotels—particularly in cases where they're just one part of an existing resort. Still, this doesn't make these camps affordable.

"We are in the luxury or beyond-

luxury categories, so everything has to be truly custom," Franco says. When a leading hospitality brand, which can't be named because of a nondisclosure agreement, asked him to design a tent that could be replicated in the Bahamas, Mexico, and Turkey, he said no: "All these places have different climates. There's no wind in Turkey, but in Holbox, Mexico, the wind is very strong. In the Bahamas, you need tents that can be completely removable for hurricane season."

This adds up to costly customizations. Some tents are mobile, others aren't. Most are made with weatherproof canvas. Some have pool decks with in-ground plumbing, others don't. As a result, Franco's tents can cost \$50,000 to \$1 million each. Plus, exposure to the elements means they need to be maintained and replaced every few years.

Of course, you can spend less (and charge less). Collective Retreats, a brand built on simpler glamping principles, offers locations in Yellowstone National Park and on Governors Island, with views of Manhattan's Financial District. Its tents start at \$150 per night.

In Australia, Sierra Escape, Nashdale Lane, and Bubbletent are new venues where you can book for less than \$300. "We wanted to do something completely different and immerse guests in the environment without taking away the luxury," says Cameron D'Arcy, co-founder of Sierra Escape, a three-tent camp in New South Wales. He says the concept is a no-brainer: "Thanks to Instagram appeal, the product almost markets itself."

The midrange glamping resort is thriving, but it's the ultra-high-end proposition that's truly resonating with travelers. Sonny Vrebac created three types of tents at Bubbletent—a property overlooking New South Wales's Capertee Valley, the world's second-largest canyon. Each is fancier than the next in an effort to serve an array of clients, but he gets disproportionate demand for the highest-end one, a PVC bubble with both climate control and its own outdoor wood-fired hot tub. He calls the struggle to manage bookings a "grand cru Champagne problem." **E**

