

And we're not just talking location. These resorts offer a variety of **OFF-THE-GRID EXPERIENCES**

# FAR and AWAY

BY KIM-MARIE EVANS

COURTESY OF EREMITO HOTEL

Really want to get away from it all? The historic Eremito Hotel in Italy is just what the doctor ordered.

**T** rue luxury means different things to different people. Perhaps it's traveling by private jet, being waited on by a personal chef or hiding away in a tropical bungalow. But for a growing number of travelers, the latest trend in rarefied luxe air seems to be the freedom from technology. While it's been reported that many Americans say that not having Wi-Fi would ruin their vacation more than food poisoning, for some, being offline is precisely the point.

Deborah Calmeyer, CEO of Roar Africa, has been sending guests on ultra-luxe safaris for over a decade. When Robert Redford returned to the continent for the first time since filming *Out of Africa*, he turned to Deborah, who is seeing an increase in travelers seeking a true escape. "I recently had one of my clients tell me that her definition of the ultimate five-star vacation experience was the freedom and permission to unplug and log off," she says.

So it got us to thinking: Can a few days without technology make any real change? According to Dr. David Greenfield, founder and medical director of the Center for Internet and Technology Addiction in West Hartford, on average, Americans are now spending three to five hours daily on their devices. That's about 15 percent of your entire life. He calls cell phones the "world's tiniest slot machines." At any moment when that notification dings, our brain gets a shot of dopamine because we have the chance that it might be something exciting. The addiction happens because our brains create new dopamine receptors, and they need to be fed continuously. Taking a break from technology can help reset these receptors and, according to Dr. Greenfield, "You'll start to experience pleasure from things you forgot were pleasurable." Even a small change is a step in the right direction.

If the thought of going sans cellular cold turkey seems ghastly, don't worry. We've broken the experiences down into a variety of off-the-grid categories. Here are some places that let you check out once you check in. »

#### NEWBIE



There's Wi-Fi, but plenty of reasons not to use it.

#### INTERMEDIATE



If you try really hard, you'll find the occasional signal.

#### EXPERT



Not a chance. You may as well be on the moon.



NAPA VALLEY

# Calistoga Ranch

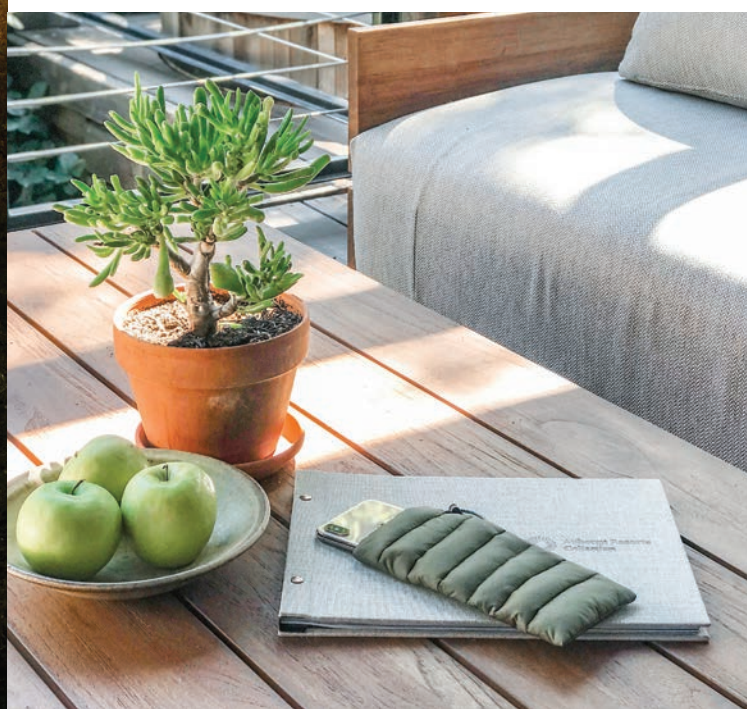
Wine isn't the only thing this region has to offer

NEWBIE /  There's Wi-Fi, but plenty of reasons not to use it.

**Y**ou need a break, and so does your phone. **CALISTOGA RANCH** has something for both of you. The recently launched "Sound Off" retreats that cater to individuals simply looking for a little peace (albeit luxurious peace) from their stressful, everyday lives.

Upon arrival, your phone gets a pint-sized sleeping bag to serve as a literal reminder to give it a rest, and you get tucked into one of the ranch's fifty nature-inspired freestanding lodges that dot the 157-acre property. With floor-to-ceiling glass windows, outdoor rain

**top:** The property has three hiking trails that offer stunning views. **middle:** The dramatic indoor/outdoor lodges are true sanctuaries to rest, relax and rejuvenate.



**top:** Settle into the swinging couches and enjoy the view. **middle:** Even your phone gets to snuggle up in its own sleeping bag. **bottom:** Yoga is just one of the many activities that will keep you from thinking about emails, text messages and Instagram.

showers and al fresco living rooms complete with roaring fireplaces, it's understandable if you never leave your room. To that end, guests have the option to preorder meals to be delivered at set times. No need to talk to anyone.

While your phone is napping, try the ranch's myriad wellness offerings. There's guided meditation, 108 Sun Salutations, or yoga and wine pairings. Yes, you sip fabulous wine and then explore it more deeply in a yoga pose. As extra as that sounds, those who've tried it swear that slowing down and meditating on the wine is pretty great. The \$400 spa credit that comes with the "Sound Off" package can also be used for in-room treatments. If you get lonely, just not for people, there's a menagerie of barn animals on the property. Visit Olive and Pepper, the resident goats; gather eggs for breakfast from the ranch's chickens or take Cal, the ranch dog, for a long meditative hike. (The ranch suggests walks be done in silence, but Cal can keep a secret.) [aubergeresorts.com/calistogaranch](http://aubergeresorts.com/calistogaranch) »





MEXICO  
**Grand Velas**

Two luxurious options for unplugging amid sand and surf

NEWBIE



There's Wi-Fi, but plenty of reasons not to use it.

There's a concierge for everything. Why not a detox concierge? Two of the Grand Velas resorts in Mexico—**RIVIERA NAYARIT** and **RIVIERA MAYA**—offer digital detox packages.

At Riviera Nayarit a detox concierge will clear your room of all electronics before your arrival. In their place, guests find board games and other analog-type entertainment. The concierge then places personal devices in an individual safe.

The resort sits just north of Puerto Vallarta on Banderas Bay on the west coast of Mexico. It is the only all-inclusive resort in the Mexican Pacific awarded Five Diamonds by AAA. While off the grid, guests can explore



CONTRIBUTED

**opposite page top:** Riviera Nayarit sunset **bottom:** There's plenty of entertainment for the little ones. **this page top:** Grand Velas Riviera Maya Resort **middle:** Kids want a unique sleeping experience? Book one of Riviera Maya's teepees. • Riviera Nayarit offers miles of coastline to explore **bottom:** A bird's-eye view of Riviera Maya



the nearby Magical Towns of San Sebastian and Talpa de Allende. In the past few decades, many towns throughout Mexico have been designated as "Pueblos Magicos" based on their historical significance and cultural richness. Kayaks, snorkel equipment and boogie boards are included. A more immersive adventure is a day exploring the Islas Marietas, the island chain made famous by Jacques Cousteau. While discovering the islands, swim to the hidden beach, Playa del Amor, reached by paddling through a small(ish) tunnel from the surrounding water.

Riviera Maya is another AAA Five Diamond all-inclusive resort and named one of the 10 Coolest Resorts in the World by Forbes. It sits just slightly south of Cancun on the Caribbean Sea near the Yucatan jungle. The resort spans eighty-five acres and is only five minutes from downtown Playa del Carmen. Close-by activities include zip-lining, kayak tours and swimming with dolphins. Explore the mystical ruins of Tulum or Chichen Itza, or go completely off the grid and swim one of the 6,000 cenotes—subterranean limestone pools full of fresh groundwater, stalagmites, stalactites, and local wildlife (think: bats by the colony and fish by the school).

Guests opting for the digital detox program trade in their electronics for complimentary access to bike tours, snorkeling tours and eco-tours that generally have a cost. They also have complimentary access to the SE Spa Water Ceremony (other guests pay \$50). The seven-step procedure features a eucalyptus-scented steam room with colortherapy, peppermint ice room, polar pool, aromatherapy sensory shower, cinnamon-scented sauna, Jacuzzi and multisensory pool. And there's no need to worry about your Instagram; detoxers can hire a personal photographer, so you'll leave with plenty of pics.

Rates start at \$355 per night and are all-inclusive; [grandvelas.com](http://grandvelas.com) »



CONTRIBUTED; TOP PHOTO BY DAVANA BROOKE ON UNSPLASH

FIJI

# Turtle Island

Here's your chance to channel your inner Brooke Shields

## INTERMEDIATE



If you try really hard, you'll find the occasional signal.

**T**he 1980 movie **BLUE LAGOON** established the “escape to a deserted island” fantasy for a generation. The island that housed the cast and crew now offers just that. When Turtle Island’s owner agreed to filming, he stipulated that he would keep all of the beach bungalows and structures when the movie wrapped. The fourteen villas have been welcoming solitude-seeking guests ever since.

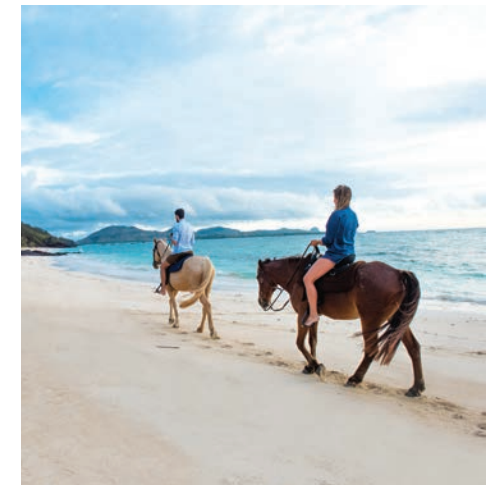
The island, originally Nanuya Levu, is located in the center of Fiji’s Yasawa archipelago. Getting to Fiji involves a ten-hour nonstop flight from L.A., followed by a seaplane ride. Upon arrival, female guests are whisked from the plane and carried to land by strapping Fijian warriors (we assume the men remove their shoes and wade in). There’s no cell signal here, and the island’s only Wi-Fi connection is spotty at best and inconveniently located on a porch next to the kitchen entrance on the resort’s one truck path.

If you need something, you use a walkie-talkie, but you rarely will as each villa comes with its

own Bure Mama. The role of the Bure Mama is to ensure you have everything you need. She tidies your villa, handles your laundry and arranges picnics and dine-outs. She can guide you on island tours, and even accompany you on snorkeling excursions pointing out marine life. Or if you prefer, she can leave you to yourself. The resort is couples-only, except for one or two weeks per year when families are allowed.

There’s a maximum of twenty-eight guests at any given time to share the island’s 500-acre expanse. Every other day you’re assigned a private beach, to have all to yourself. The staff brings you everything you need, like a picnic lunch and a full cooler. Then they take off until it’s time to return, putting up an “occupied” sign where the golf cart would enter.

Rates start at \$2,100 per night for both couples and families. During family week, children under five each get their own nanny, and older children are assigned a Bure Buddy, leaving Mom and Dad free to relax. Rates include all activities, even scuba diving. [turtlefigi.com](http://turtlefigi.com) »



**top:** Every luxurious villa is appointed with Fijian art and artisan-crafted furnishings. **middle:** Explore the water’s edge on horseback (taking a break for a champagne toast, of course). **bottom:** Kayak the serene Blue Lagoon.

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CUMBERLAND ISLAND, GEORGIA

# Greyfield Inn

Step back in time and enjoy a slower pace and quiet Southern beauty

INTERMEDIATE



If you try really hard, you'll find the occasional signal.



**S**ituated off the southeast Georgia coast, this twenty-mile-long island of rugged unpopulated beaches has no bridge access, no telephone lines, no paved roads and no accommodations other than the stately Greyfield Inn. Never heard of it? That's just the way they like it. This resort is so off the radar that JFK Jr. and Carolyn Bessette were able to hold their ultra-secret surprise wedding here in 1996.

The inn is an elegant old compound with fifteen guest rooms initially built in 1900 by Thomas and Lucy Carnegie as a retreat for their daughter. The Carnegie family still oversees operations. Other than hotel

guests and day visitors (the island is a National Seashore operated by the National Park Service), the largest population is wild horses. The horses' origin stories vary from mission arrivals in the 1500s to plantation animals in the 1700s. The park service has attempted to keep count and estimate that around 120 to 150 horses call Cumberland home. It's the only herd of feral horses on the Atlantic coast that's not managed (no food, water, veterinary care or population control). An entire day can be spent just photographing these majestic animals, but with no Wi-Fi and negligible cell service, you'll have to wait to post your pics on Instagram.

THIS PAGE: (TOP) PETER FRANK EDWARDS; (BOTTOM) DAVID WRIGHT; OPPOSITE PAGE FROM TOP: PETER FRANK EDWARDS, HUNTER MCCRAE; EMILY DORIO, PETER FRANK EDWARDS



**above:** Nearly 150 feral horses call Cumberland Island home. **left:** Founded in 1893, the first African Baptist Church is where JFK Jr. and Carolyn Bessette were married. **below left:** Old-fashioned Southern charm awaits guests in every room. **below right:** Read a book, play some chess—the library offers a peaceful retreat.

All guests of the inn have access to a fleet of bicycles to explore the island. There are abandoned mansions, the First African Baptist Church (where the Kennedy wedding occurred) and a few museums. Guided history and nature tours are complimentary for hotel guests. Activities can range from kayaking with dolphins, swimming on a deserted beach

or napping on the estate's breezy verandah. To get to Greyfield, you'll fly to Jacksonville, Florida, then shuttle to the dock at Fernandina Beach, where the hotel's private boat will meet you for a forty-five-minute ride to the island. Rates start at around \$800 per night and include service charges and meals. [greyfieldinn.com](http://greyfieldinn.com) »



ITALY

# Eremito Hotel

Step back into the fourteenth century (with a lot more luxury)

EXPERT



Not a chance. You may as well be on the moon.



find: televisions, phones or a Wi-Fi connection. This is total digital detox. Each cell is named after a prominent Catholic saint. These saints follow you throughout your time at Eremito—their names are engraved on your room key; at mealtime, their names appear on napkin rings to identify your spot at the table; you'll also find their stories on a wall-hanging above your bed.

Though the divine is clearly present, and prayer is offered in the chapel each morning, participation is purely optional. Daily meditation and yoga are offered. Still, the point of Eremito is to stay put, relax, meditate, get back in touch with one's inner being, personal spirit or, if you like, a higher power. There are trails to walk or hike on the hotel's ample acreage, with more beyond its borders in the nearly 7,500-acre nature reserve surrounding it.

The wellness area features a stone steam room, chromotherapy (color therapy) hot tub and a yoga studio. Each night a gong calls guests to a communal dinner table for a silent candlelit meal. For those who find the thought a tad awkward, there is plenty of locally



**F**ormer fashion designer and Italian playboy Marcello Murzilli has been ahead of many trends in his lifetime. But one of his most interesting endeavors is the Eremito Hotel, which can only be described as a modern luxury monastery. Murzilli opened the property five years ago.

The hotel, located in Umbria, is the site of a fourteenth century monastery, which Murzilli restored using ancient masonry techniques. The finished product has the soul of a monastery with the service of a five-star resort.

There are twelve rooms called Celluzze ("cells"), all designed specifically for solo travelers. The ninety-six-square-foot spaces feature luxury hemp linens, marble sinks and petite window seats from which to view the rolling Italian countryside. What you will not



COURTESY OF EREMITO HOTEL



COURTESY OF EREMITO HOTEL

sourced wine on hand.

Eremito is just ninety minutes outside of Rome. Room rates start at \$230 per night and include all meals. [eremito.com](http://eremito.com). »

**opposite page top:** Guests enjoy communal, silent meals. • The stunning stone exterior • Every architectural detail was seen to in the renovations.

**opposite page bottom:** The rooms, though small and rustic, offer a peaceful refinement. **this page top:** The yoga room overlooking the gorgeous Italian countryside.

**this page bottom:** One of the areas where guests can reflect and meditate with the help of soft Gregorian chants in the background.



ALASKA

# Sheldon Chalet

The ultimate in stunning seclusion

CHRIS BURKARD



**opposite page:** If you really want to get away from it all, here's your chalet. **top:** You may be in the middle of nowhere, but every amenity awaits you here. • Best seat in the house to view the Northern Lights. **middle:** Nobody goes hungry here. **bottom:** Guests arrive for their stay.

## EXPERT



Not a chance. You may as well be on the moon.

**T**here's going off the grid, and then there's **SHELDON CHALET.**

This luxury resort is perched on a glacier in the shadow of **DENALI** (formerly known as Mt. McKinley), the highest mountain in North America, and offers zero connectivity. On-site guides, the chef and concierge all use radios to communicate with the outside world. The air here is some of the thinnest on the planet, and until the chalet's recent opening, the only humans to sleep in this rarefied place were rugged mountaineers willing to risk their lives.

The late patriarch Don Sheldon made a name for himself as one of the best Alaskan bush pilots in history, pioneering the technique of landing planes on glaciers. He dreamed that someday visitors would enjoy the pristine isolation of the area that now bears his name. He claimed five acres under the homesteading act before Alaska was even a state. What he and his wife weren't able to achieve in their lifetimes, their children now have.

Sheldon Chalet is more than just an engineering marvel in one of the more precarious places on earth. With a celebrity chef serving gourmet food, nightly

showings of the aurora borealis and shooting stars, and the opportunity to experience Alaska as almost no one else can, Sheldon Chalet is an unlikely luxury resort.

A concierge and experienced guides can plan any number of outdoor activities at no additional cost. Some of these include spelunking in a snow cavern, rock climbing and/or rappelling, sled runs, gourmet glacier picnics, igloo building and trips to remote hot springs. Aurora season typically begins mid-September and concludes mid-April. While a Northern Lights sighting can never be guaranteed, it's rare to

stay three nights in-season and not witness the celestial spectacle.

There's no way to get to Sheldon Chalet by land. It requires a forty-five-minute helicopter ride from Talkeetna, a small town about two hours north of Anchorage.

Rates start at \$3,150 per night per person and include gear, two adventure guides, a concierge, gourmet meals with premium wine pairings, guided glacier adventures and helicopter transport to and from the chalet. The property requires a minimum of a three-night stay. [sheldonchalet.com](http://sheldonchalet.com) or email [visit@sheldonchalet.com](mailto:visit@sheldonchalet.com)



JEFF SHULTZ: TOP AND CENTER; CHRIS BURKARD: BOTTOM