

# Rented penguins and \$300,000 dinners: The wildest holiday requests from the super rich

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Whether they're arranging \$300,000 private dinners with celebrity chefs or pop-up luxury campsites in the steppes of the northern Sahara, luxury travel agents and concierge services manage to make the impossible a reality.

Last summer, luxury concierge service Element Lifestyle secured the key to the Sistine Chapel so a New York family of six could open the doors and enjoy Michelangelo's stunning artwork alone -- an experience that cost roughly US\$75,000.

On a flight to Seoul, the Asia travel specialists at Remote Lands helped a prominent Korean-American family of four buy out all 12 First Class seats -- at about \$20,000 per seat -- on Korean Air so they could enjoy the cabin in private.

When a family forgot to get a Myanmar visa for one of their children, award-winning travel company Red Savannah's local fixer reportedly managed to convince the head of immigration in Yangon to approve the forms while the clients were in the air. When the travelers landed, the visa was waiting for them.

In Iceland, luxury adventure travel specialist Black Tomato made a dream proposal come true by hiding a diamond ring inside an ice cave for the bride-to-be to discover. On another trip, Black Tomato sent a Hollywood cinematographer, who had filmed blockbusters like "Star Wars" and "Interstellar," to shoot a family on their six-week sailing odyssey through the Indonesian islands. In total, the group spent roughly US\$665,000.

Super-elite travelers can afford to go anywhere and do anything, but often rely on teams of highly skilled, adaptive and creative travel experts to make it happen.

"The only reason any of these things are possible is that we've got a fantastic network of fixers around the world, who know us and the types of experiences we like to provide," Tom Marchant, co-founder of Black Tomato, tells CNN Travel.

"There is sometimes a Willy Wonka element to the way we work. Is this possible? I don't know ... Let's explore it!"

## Going above and beyond

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Some people might walk into a San Diego hotel suite and find a basket of fruit or perhaps a bottle of wine. Others discover a trio of live penguins, borrowed from the zoo for the afternoon.

That's how Element Lifestyle founder Michael Albanese once surprised a client, whose girlfriend was obsessed with penguins.

"When we learned that [the girlfriend] loved penguins, it sparked an idea. Can we hire an animal wrangler? Can we get the hotel on board? We started making calls and it came together pretty easily," he tells CNN Travel.

"There were three penguins in total -- one was a bit grumpy and stood off in the corner. But needless to say, that set the tone for the entire weekend."

Albanese, who works with clients who spend roughly \$100,000-\$200,000 per two-week trip, has also created treasure hunts around Europe for families and friends, complete with a unique theme song written and performed by a well-known recording artist.

For another client, the company arranged a private eight-course dinner hosted by celebrity chef Eric Ripert, of the world-renowned Le Bernardin in New York City.

"Clients ask us for the impossible and they know it. Usually, these requests are so far outside of the box, it presents an exciting and unique problem to solve," says Albanese. "These wishes require time, patience and tenacity."

In the case of Ripert, he says, it took over nine months to convince the chef, who rarely does private events of this nature.

"It wasn't even a milestone or a birthday or anything. The client's wife just loves Eric Ripert, so this was a dream dinner. We also hired the sommelier from French Laundry to suggest wine pairings, and he found this port on a shipwreck that was older than Abraham Lincoln. It was easily a \$300,000 dinner."

## **Personal, unique, immersive**

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## **What 'luxury' means to millionaires and billionaires**

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## **Access and assistance**

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## **The ultimate isolation**

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## **Luxury travel vs Covid-19**

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