

Opinion

# Would you like gingerbread with that?

Everyone imagines the life of a luxury travel editor is all caviar and champagne. At Christmas, it's sheer torture.

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Christmas means just one thing in the life of the average five-star-fatigued luxury travel editor: your email inbox goes even more over the top. Not only are the best hotels, safari joints, cruise ships and airlines inviting your publication to lounge around and write about their top suites, but all those invitations suddenly have an added festive spin.

Take the media release for decorative glass baubles filled with gin so you can "gingle all the way through Christmas". Or the airlines' festive in-flight menus. Gingerbread roulade en route to Munich anyone? Or chocolate mint domes and yule log over Alaska?



Gingerbread features heavily in the luxury resort activity list. Jennifer See

Like Santa's sack, my inbox is bulging with these offers, including PR pitches that make spending \$10,000 a night in a villa perched on a Tasmanian cliff top sound reasonable. But only if Santa is coming down the chimney. Actually, now I read the email, it has three chimneys.

Six Senses, which has properties in the world's most decadent locations, declares that "with the festive Xmas season fast approaching", it has "bundled up a selection of unforgettable guest experiences" across its resorts in the Seychelles, Singapore, Fiji, Thailand, Bali, Vietnam and the Maldives.

Special experiences include making gingerbread houses and sushi Christmas trees, watching dolphins on their morning hunt while eating breakfast in the largest over-water restaurant in the Indian Ocean, and taking champagne sunrise cruises.

I guess it beats fighting with the in-laws over who was supposed to make the mint sauce.

The only problem is that the Six Senses resorts tend to start at \$1400 a night in low season, so Lord knows what Christmas costs.

For \$3580 or so a night, Kokomo Private Island Fiji has put together a "12 days of Christmas program", which also involves gingerbread workshops and dolphins. Those heading for any luxury resort be warned: dolphins and gingerbread are a strong trend.



Even the Christmas tree is five-star at the Six Senses Laamu resort in the Maldives. Supplied

Tahiti seems to be skipping Christmas. "Six reasons to spend New Year in Tahiti on The Moorings," trumpets the only festive season email I've had from that pocket of paradise. Reason number one? "Escape the crowds on board your own private yacht."

Tahiti, I don't need any reasons to visit, let alone six. If I could afford it for the extended family and our other December-January hangers-on, we'd be there. Like, tomorrow.

But the final Christmas gong goes to the Maldives: "Never has a luxury trip to the Maldives been more attainable," promises Vakkaru Resort's PR team. From December 20 to January 10, you can get 50 per cent off over-water villa rooms if you stay seven nights. Among the many activities on offer are singing bowl meditation sessions, an anti-ageing facial workshop and its Coconut Club. No mention of dolphins or gingerbread, but at \$3732 a night, that's probably a given.

By contrast, Western Australia is keeping it real, running hard on a simple "summer sundowner" theme – as in just get to the end of the year, crawl across the border, and we have a lychee martini with your name on it in Fremantle. Stressed east coasters take note: if you head to WA, you delay the arrival of Christmas by three hours. A luxury in itself.

In late-breaking news, Hyde Park in London will again sport a "Bavarian-style Christmas market", and high-end footwear designer Christian Louboutin is designing the Christmas tree at Claridge's hotel.

Sitting at work in my pagoda of privilege reading these emails, I realised I had forgotten to book our family Christmas holiday – which, with a Sydney mortgage and six of us, inevitably translates as Airbnb or Stayz.



Christian Louboutin has again designed the Christmas tree at Claridge's in London. Supplied

I left booking so late, even a teepee about 50 kilometres from Byron Bay's centre was \$989 a night (without linen). That's if there's even a teepee left. I managed to find a cave about 80 kilometres out.

Everyone imagines the life of a travel editor is all caviar and champagne and no more cattle class. At Christmas, it's just sheer torture.

## Travel briefs

### Sweet Dreamliner

In October, Etihad launched a fourth daily service between Abu Dhabi and London, using a 787-9 Dreamliner. "The flagship Abu Dhabi to London route is tremendously popular with business and leisure travellers, and those transiting beyond our hub," the airline's commercial officer, Robin Kamark, says. Because they are quieter and have more humidity in the air, Dreamliners are voted a nicer way to travel.

### Emirates talks turkey

In November, Emirates ordered 50 A350-900 aircraft worth \$US16 billion (\$23 billion), with delivery of the first aircraft expected in May 2023 and the roll-out continuing until 2028. On the festive front, throughout December, Emirates passengers in economy will enjoy turkey roll with mashed potato, pan-fried Vienna chicken sausage, green peas, baby carrots and cranberry jus lié, while first and business class will be served roast turkey breast with apricot stuffing, roast potatoes, creamy Brussels sprouts, turkey bacon and cranberry jus lié.

Fiona Carruthers edits Sophisticated Traveller magazine. The next issue is out on Friday, February 21, in The Australian Financial Review.

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Fiona Carruthers has been the Financial Review's Travel editor since 2018 and editor of Sophisticated Traveller since 2012. Prior to joining the Financial Review she was deputy travel editor of Traveller and has written travel for The Sunday Times, The Financial Times, The Australian, Time Magazine, and The Sunday Telegraph. Fiona has produced travel features for ABC Radio National and Deutsche Welle. Connect with Fiona on Twitter. Email Fiona at fcarruthers@afrc.com.au



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