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WIELDING A BLEND OF EXPERTISE, CONNECTIONS, CUSTOMER SERVICE, AND GOOD VALUE, THESE SELECT TRAVEL CONSULTANTS ARE THE PROS TO TURN TO FOR YOUR NEXT BIG TRIP

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keyed in to the most knowledgeable guides and cutting-edge destinations. Zambia and Gabon, she says, still offer the "real Africa" experience, which is vanishing in more-developed countries (888-596-6377; info@exploreafrica.net; exploreafrica.net).

East Africa

Linda Friedman, Custom Safaris, Bethesda, Maryland

Friedman—who has an office in Nairobi, with handpicked support staff and salaried guides—builds both luxury accommodations and cultural exchanges into her safaris. A proponent of philanthropic

A former camp manager and guide in Tanzania, Redding plans safaris and Kilimanjaro climbs that tread lightly on the earth—and your wallet. He urges every client to spend at least one night at a tented camp and excels at planning roughing-it adventures such as multiday hikes during which you sleep in domed tents (866-778-1089; kent@adventuresinfrica.com; adventuresinfrica.com).

Nina Wennersten, Hippe Creek Safaris, Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey
Wennersten favors small camps and lodges, as well as private reserves

Seventeen years of interviewing travel agents and tour operators for "The Perrin Report" and other *Condé Nast Traveler* consumer news articles have provided me with a well-thumbed Rolodex of the most trusted consultants—people who offer the best combination of specialized knowledge, insider connections, user-friendliness, and value for money.

Each year, my team and I evaluate hundreds of new applicants, and only a handful make the cut. Our recommended specialists undergo a rigorous screening process that includes a 27-question application, sample itineraries, extensive phone interviews, and client references. Those who have inadequate firsthand experience of the destination they claim to specialize in or who send an insufficient number of clients there annually are disqualified.

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d specialist or to

nominate someone new for consideration, please e-mail me at perrinfeedback@cntraveler.com.

If you prefer not to hop from specialist to specialist but to develop a relationship with one generalist, the consultants marked with a **C** are your best bet. Highly respected in the travel business, these generalists have a track record for making many *Condé Nast Traveler* readers happy in a range of destinations. Even if you settle into a long-term relationship with one of them, it's still advisable to contact the listed specialists to find out what they offer that the generalist doesn't, particularly when it involves a major journey where the right guides and other local connections are critical. —W. P.

TRAVELER.COM What do *Condé Nast Traveler* readers say about these travel pro? **Travel Agent Finder** to read feedback from subscribers who have written to us the listed specialists. At cntraveler.com/travelagentfinder you can also narrow region or interest, get details on each consultant that you can print out or e-mailing the benefits you can get from a specialist.

entering national parks, so that you'll feel
is the only vehicle around on game
res—even in the crowded Ngorongoro
crater. Instead of staged events, her ite-
naries include actual cultural experiences
such as tribal weddings (866-930-9124;
sa@hippocreek safaris.com; hippocreek
saris.com).

Madagascar

Monique Rodriguez, Cortez Travel/Madagascar Expeditions, Salina Beach, California

Rodriguez knows the best spots for the island's famous flora and fauna and has leads on traditional ceremonies (including the Fitampoha, Tsanga-tsaina, and Sambatra) that reflect the soul of Malagasy culture (800-854-1029; monique@cortez-usa.com; cortez-usa.com).

Morocco

Diane Hilliard, Hilliard & Olander, Stillwater, Minnesota

Hilliard is hip to Morocco's hot accommodations, burgeoning design scene, and traditional artisans. For an authentic cultural performance, she recommends dining at a *riad* restaurant that has live Gnawain and lute music (651-275-8960; diane@hilliardolander.com).

Joel Zack, Heritage Tours, New York City

Zack wrote a book on Morocco's architecture, and the connections he forged help clients to see the culture inside the Casbah: "Have your camera ready for the 'magical hour,' he says—the period just before sunset when the light over the High Atlas Mountains turns ethereal (800-378-4555; joel@heritagetoursonline.com; heritagetoursonline.com).

Rwanda and Uganda

Thomas M. Keesling, Tom Keesling Travel/Frosch International Travel, Denver

The former honorary consul to Rwanda

and founder of the Mountain Gorilla Conservation Fund is current on the newest hotels and the best-trained guides for gorilla trekking (888-759-4008; tomkees@aol.com).

Seychelles

Astrid Brewer, Michael's Travel Centre Inc., Agoura Hills, California

A Seychelles native, Brewer knows the hottest Plahé hangouts and La Digue beaches and can guide you to undiscovered outer islands such as Alphonse and Desroches (818-889-2246; astrid@michaeltstravel.com; islandspendor.com).

Southern Africa

Julian Harrison, Premier Tours, Philadelphia

This South African native, co-author of *Fodor's African Safari*, can have you herd-counting by jeep, horse, elephant, or balloon. In Cape Town, he advises, take the cable car to the top of Table Mountain in the early morning, before clouds obscure the view (800-545-1910, ext. 429; julianh@premiertours.com; premiertours.com).

Ryan Hilton, Admiral Travel, Sarasota, Florida

This native Zimbabwean's trips incorporate artistic touches such as sunrise poetry readings and painting sessions at water holes. He reports that wildlife sightings, accommodations, and services in Botswana's Okavango Delta and Limpopo regions rival those around South Africa's Kruger National Park, where he used to guide (941-951-1801; africa@admiraltravel.com; admiraltravel.com).

Mark W. Nolting, Africa Adventure Company, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

The author of *Africa's Top Wildlife Countries*, Nolting specializes in retreats to private game reserves unvisited by crowds. A current favorite? Botswana's

C = Recommended generalist

WHEN TO USE THESE TRAVEL SPECIALISTS

Only for certain types of trips will the listed consultants add enough value to justify the extra cost. So determine first whether you are better off using their services for the travel you have in mind or making the arrangements yourself. If you're looking for a trip without bells or whistles, or the cheapest one you can get, you're better off booking it on your own.

Hire a Pro for . . .

- >> Complicated customized itineraries.
- >> Four- or five-star hotel stays.
- >> First- and business-class airline tickets.
- >> English-speaking guides.
- >> Special access to monuments, sights, or people.
- >> Cruises, especially with private shore excursions.
- >> Special occasions.

Don't Hire a Pro for . . .

- >> Single or cheap components of a leisure itinerary (a flight in coach class or on a low-fare airline, train tickets, a one-day tour).
- >> Accommodations that are inexpensive (e.g., a B&B) or run-of-the-mill (say, a midrange chain hotel).
- >> Redeeming frequent-flyer miles or guest points for simple trips.

TRAVEL SPECIALISTS

Machabe, where a safari costs less than half what it does elsewhere in the country (800-882-9453; nobingac@aol.com; africa-adventure.com).

Phoebe Weinberg, Greatways Travel, Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan
Having made 49 trips to Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, Weinberg knows all the ins and outs of the poth lodges and camps—down to their habit of accepting only certain credit cards or cash for incidental charges—and preps her clients with a customized 75-page book containing details on every aspect of their trip, from facts about the animals they'll see to tipping etiquette to Cape Town's hot restaurants (313-886-4710; phobe@greatways-travel.com; greatways-travel.com).

West Africa
Will Weber, J. Ann Arbor, MI
A former Peace Corps volunteer, Weber emphasizes nature, such as visiting Cameroon and he's in the know about desert feasts. journers-int.com

THE AMERICAS
Argentina
Vanessa Guibé, Limitless Argentina
With a Ph.D. in this Argentine country's architecture, Guibé can also add an alpine ski excursion to your itinerary (202-536-5812; vanessa@limitlessargentina.com; limitlessargentina.com).

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru
Emmanuel Burgio, Blue Parallel, Potomac, Maryland
Many of Burgio's clients come from his past life as an investment banker, and they're willing to pay top dollar for his white-glove service with authentic touches—like a bossa nova show at your *pousada* on a private Brazilian island—and a focus on the region's World Heritage Sites (800-256-5307; info@blueparallel.com; blueparallel.com).

Tom Damon, Southwind Adventures, Littleton, Colorado
An avid trekker, Damon arranges sporty but comfortable trips that highlight nature, archaeology, and adventure, from the Galápagos to Machu Picchu—which he likes to approach via the Salcantay route (less crowded than the famous Inca Trail). He also knows Bolivia and Venezuela (800-377-9463; tom@southwindadventures.com; southwindadventures.com).

Belize
Abigail Logsdon, Liadis Travel Ltd., Newtown Square, Pennsylvania
Belize is much more than just a beach getaway, says Logsdon, who proves it by populating her itineraries with rain forest excursions, visits to Mayan ruins, and private picnics at waterfalls (610-353-8330; abigail@liadis.com; liadis.com).

Bermuda
Vicky McGlynn, Traveling of Summit, New Jersey
Having owned a house in Bermuda for 38 years, McGlynn is familiar with all of the island's options, from secluded villas to

deep-sea-fishing boats to moped rentals. She favors the off-season (Nov–March), when prices plunge, festivals abound, and the golf is sublime (908-277-2700, ext. 11; vickym@travelorgsummit.com).

Brazil
Augusto Simas, Travel Place, Rio de Janeiro
Whether you're into nature, culture, or beaches, Simas knows Brazil's undiscovered highlights. Only a native like him would stand clients to Rio's Friday- and Saturday-night summer concerts atop Sugar Loaf. Take the cable car up for a drink in an open-air lounge before the Brazilian rock bands start playing around midnight (55-21-2102-8401; asimas@travelplace.com.br).

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Mary Pyle Peters, Distinctive Journeys, Blairdsden, California
Peters is your ticket for a romantic long weekend in Quebec City or a family trip to the Rockies. While many people watch the International Musical Fireworks Competition from the base of Montmorency Falls, she's scooped out the premier view from the restaurant at the top (530-836-0684; marytraveler@hotmail.com).

Caribbean
Martha Gaughen, Sterling Travel, Atlanta
Gaughen knows the best villas, resorts, and activities for bride or honeymooners. To show clients that Jamaica is much more than beaches, she arranges biking trips into the Blue Mountains and tours of old plantation homes (800-447-2799; martha@sterlingtravel.com; sterlingtravel.com).

Terry McCabe, Altour International, Fair Lawn, New Jersey
This veteran island-hopper knows both the luxury resorts and the hidden small hotels with old-world charm. Peak season lasts just four months, she points out, with values to be had the rest of the year (201-703-8585; terrymccabe@altour.com; altour.com).

Becky Yoith, Travel Experts, Raleigh, North Carolina
Yoith is a whiz when it comes to all-inclusive resorts. Don't challenge her to a game of

Caribbean trivia unless you already know that motorized water sports are forbidden during Easter week in the Dominican Republic or that touching the fruit of a machinell tree causes blisters (814-734-1112; becky@travexperts.com; beckywith.com).

Costa Rica and Nicaragua
Leigh Ann Cloutier, Rico Tours, Austin, Texas
Cloutier sends hundreds of clients to Costa Rica's bohemian hotels and upscale resorts each year as well as to Nicaragua's up-and-coming hideaways. In Costa Rica, it doesn't get any more authentic than the September endurance horse race around Lake Arenal, she says, a two-day event with festivities each night (512-303-0001; lac@ricotours.com; ricotours.com).

Richard Edwards, Wildland Adventures, Seattle
Edwards resided in Costa Rica for 12 years and uses his background as a sustainable-development economist to weave eco-conscious elements into his itineraries. He's especially well-versed in the small, upscale family-run lodges, many of which have strong ties to their communities (800-345-4453; richard@wildland.com; wildland.com).

Guatemala
Brady Binstadt, Geographic Expeditions, San Francisco
Between visits to lesser-known markets like the one in Solola and guided volcanic climbs off Lake Atitlán, Binstadt's clients soak up Guatemala's rich culture in charming small hotels and even homestays (800-777-8183; brady@geexp.com; geexp.com).

Mexico
Ben Gritzewsky, Froesch International Travel, Houston
This Mexico City native likes to steer clients off the beaten path on trips that illuminate the country's art and architecture—from a director-led private tour of Guanajuato's Don Quixote Museum to the Las Pozas estate, with its Surrealist art (713-590-8216; bgritzewsky@froeschtravel.com).

TIP 2

DON'T BE PHONE SHY

A travel consultant is making personal decisions on your behalf (the type of hotel you'll stay in, the sights to see or skip). An initial phone conversation is essential for the agent to understand your personality and needs; further correspondence can often be done via e-mail. Never delegate trip-planning to an assistant.

Ada King, Connoisseur's Travel, Chicago
King covers all aspects (and corners) of the country, from the Mayan temples to the cuisine of Mexico City. Her shopper clients know to be in Oaxaca for the city market on Saturday and in Tlacolula for the Indian market on Sunday (888-672-1140; ada@connoisseurstravel.com; connoisseurstravel.com).

Jewell Ramos, WorldviewTravel, Santa Ana, California
After 90-plus trips to Mexico, Ramos knows the more affordable sights, from colonial cities to beach towns, and tailor trips to appeal to all members of the family. The Calakmul Biosphere Reserve is a treasure, she says, with its Mayan ocelot jaguars, reptiles, and birds (828-890-3547; jrucky@brinet.com).

Panama
Meg McGriff North, Brownell Travel, Birmingham, Alabama
North can arrange overwater bungalows off the northern coast and visits to remote Indian communities. Rather than book an entire cruise ship itinerary just to see the canal, she advises, do a partial or full transit on a smaller, independently owned vessel (205-414-1653; meg@brownelltravel.com; brownelltravel.com).

ASIA
Bali
Diane Embree, Michael's Travel Centre, Westlake Village, California
Whether you want to be by the beach or among the rice paddies, Embree can help you navigate the myriad accommodation options as well as open doors to the local culture with visits to a Hindu priest, a medicine man, or an elementary school (818-707-0091; diane@michaels-travel.com; balliarongtours.com).

Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka
Brent Olson, Geographic Expeditions, San Francisco
Olson has visited Bhutan more than 40 times and has been sending clients to Nepal and Sri Lanka for 20 years. He knows the best rooms at the plush Amankora, in Paris, but also steers clients to several recently opened locally owned hotels (800-777-8183; brent@geexp.com; geexp.com).

Cambodia
Mary DeForest Cardoza, Cardoza-Bungey Travel, Palo Alto, California
Cardoza, who lived in Phnom Penh, knows the best sights, guides, and events, including two colorful ways to see the Angkor ruins: a helicopter flight over the complex or an elephant ride through the overgrown city of Angkor Thom (650-325-5600; mary@cardoza.com; cardoza.com).

China
Karin Hansen, Froesch International Travel, Deerfield, Illinois
Hansen, whose Beijing-based daughter keeps her up-to-date on the latest trends, counsels clients with more moderate budgets on how to include memorable elements while eliminating costlier ones, and above all on how to avoid the sights jammed with the bus-tour crowd (847-948-5300, ext. 1322; khansen@froeschtravel.com).

Gerald Hatherly, Abercrombie & Kent, Hong Kong
A&K has access to places and people that other operators in China don't, although its white-glove service steers travelers away from gritty but authentic experiences. Hatherly calibrates his itineraries to the minute: Visit Beijing over a weekend for the Panjyuan curio market, the Forbidden City before the galleries close in the afternoon, and the Temple of Heaven in the early morning, when locals gather to

Recommended generalist