

Bloomberg

The Ultimate Luxury Travel Flex Is Doing Something No One Has Done Before

Travelers bored with private jets and exclusive resorts are paying millions for world-first adventures, from unclimbed peaks to undiscovered shipwrecks.

By Madison Darbyshire | September 25, 2026



“This was a sight, so surpassing every thing that can be imagined,” wrote explorer and botanist Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker on an expedition to the Antarctic in 1841. Sailing through uncharted waters, he described snowcapped peaks and a dazzling golden sunset over an active volcano no human eye had ever beheld. The experience, he wrote, was amplified by the knowledge that they were the first people to see it.

Almost two centuries after Hooker visited the Antarctic, that pursuit is no longer in the exclusive purview of daring adventurers. As the world’s wealthiest travelers seek out ever more novel and private experiences, high-end expedition operators are devising trips that can’t be replicated, including “world firsts” and record-setting feats.

That might mean reaching a previously unvisited place by land, sea or air, or doing something there that nobody has before. One client of Cookson Adventures, a London-based expedition company, e-foiled across a lake in Iceland; another helped release leopard sharks into the wild in Indonesia. A third helicoptered from his yacht to camp on the edge of a remote volcano. Cookson offers what it calls Power Trips, uniquely concentrated adventures for “those who refuse to waste a moment.”

“These ultrahigh-net-worth and very successful people have become numb to some of the luxury that exists in their world,” says Nick Davies, Cookson’s managing director. “They’ve stayed in the Four Seasons and Mandarin, and it’s all become the same and homogeneous. They’re seeking more variety and meaning to what they do.”

How to Manufacture a World First

Dreaming up a trip no one has done before is one thing. Pulling it off is another. Most trips require specialist knowledge, months of preparation and technical experience that only the most affluent travelers can afford. Luxury adventure companies employ former military personnel, mountaineers, submersible experts, film producers, fixers, logisticians and wildlife researchers to create expeditions at almost any comfort level.

Clients of Eyos Expeditions, a Seattle-based expedition provider, have reached the deepest points of all five oceans, heli-skied in Antarctica and traversed the Northwest Passage by superyacht. And as once-remote destinations become more accessible to wealthy tourists, the frontier keeps moving further afield. Boat dealers report growing demand for superyachts able to withstand extreme cold and ice. One

client sailed a catamaran to Antarctica and “could step onto an iceberg from the back of the boat,” says David Johnson, a yacht broker in Florida.



Even at the ends of the Earth, luxury needn't be left behind. Eyos employs “Michelin-caliber” chefs on all but its most technically difficult trips, while Cookson has set up mobile camps with chefs and running hot water in remote parts of Africa. It's taken over entire homes, repainted and furnished them to a client's taste.

“We always say as long as you have great food, great linen, great coffee, maybe a nice cocktail,” you can make an experience feel like luxury, Davies says. Yet it's often the hardest parts of an expedition, or nights spent “roughing it”

in tents, that provide the best dinner-party fodder afterward.

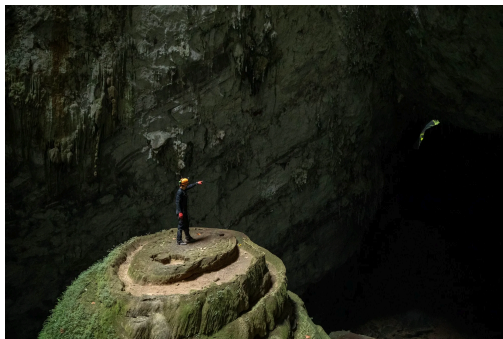
“For some people it is about notoriety and getting attention, they want to have a legacy,” says Eyos co-founder Rob McCallum. “Then we get some people where it's almost like a calling, there's a spiritual aspect to it.”

Cookson's average trip costs about \$500,000, while world-first expeditions can approach \$2 million, Davies says. At Eyos prices range from \$500,000 to dive a “virgin” shipwreck to \$2.4 million to attempt the first crossing of Antarctica by snowmobile — and still more to ascend an unclimbed peak.

Some clients arrive with a specific ambition; others simply ask what remains to be done. Eyos and Cookson keep lists of potential expeditions, as well as “firsts” still to be claimed. Once clients get a taste, they tend to escalate. “People come to you in subsequent years saying, ‘What can we do to stretch this limit?’” McCallum says. Heli-skiing in the Alps one year can lead to heli-skiing in Antarctica the next.

These expeditions are hardly environmentally benign: Reaching remote places by superyacht, helicopter or private aircraft comes with its own footprint. Operators say they nevertheless try to prevent clients from causing additional damage once they arrive. Eyos steers travelers away from loading their yachts with “toys” such as 4x4s that could leave decade-long damage on pristine landscapes.

“Those just aren't the kinds of trips we are interested in working on,” McCallum says.



Chris Brown, 64, is attempting to become the first person to visit all eight of the world's poles of inaccessibility, the points on Earth farthest from either land or sea. Since 2019 he's reached seven, with varying degrees of difficulty. The North American pole is relatively easy to tick off, in rural South Dakota. But getting to the Oceanic Pole, or Point Nemo, 2,688 kilometers (1,670 miles) from the nearest coastline in the South Pacific, required Eyos and three weeks at sea.

“People want to be unique,” Brown says. There are diminishing returns from buying another watch or car, he

says. Experiences are different: “It stays with you and gives you stories to talk about in the pub.”

What's Left to Discover

Exploration has always required money and patronage, but historically it also came with an expectation that explorers would record what they found and report back. Brown keeps detailed travelogues and shares videos on social media of his expeditions. For many of today's ultrarich explorers, however, privacy is part of the luxury: Expedition organizers maintain strict confidentiality around their clients and trips.

There can still be a public benefit. Operators sometimes pair clients headed to remote locations with scientists who need transportation or access. The expert presence is often viewed as a value add for wealthy clients. "We always say, 'You'll end up in this place, do you want to do science there?'" McCallum says. "'How do you want to maximize the experience?'"

Because of complex logistics and recent technology, many of the world's remaining "firsts" are at sea. There are hundreds of undiscovered shipwrecks in the North Atlantic, and the vast majority of oceanic trenches remain unexplored and unmapped.

American private equity and venture capital executive Victor Vescovo describes his urge to explore as "compulsive." After summiting Mount Everest in 2010, he turned his attention downward: In 2019 he became the first person to reach the deepest points of all five oceans, including the Mariana Trench, in the Eynos-led Five Deeps Expedition. Guinness World Records recognized him for covering the greatest vertical distance between Earth's highest and lowest points.

"The ocean is quiet and ominous because you can't see very far, and it just feels ancient in a way that's incredible," says Vescovo, who also flew to space aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard in 2022.



Doing something no one has done before also means there's no blueprint. "With world firsts there's no case study to learn from, there's no playbook," McCallum says. "That means you're learning while doing, and risk goes way up."

Vescovo calls Eynos both his expedition leader and his safeguard, helping him navigate the line between daring and danger. "You try to mitigate everything you can so the level of risk you take is not reckless," he says. "But if you're well in the envelope of safety, you're not pushing the boundaries of technology or the ability of humans to adapt." For people who crave this kind of adventure, he adds, "sometimes it's hard to tell where the line is."



Money and expertise can mitigate those risks, but they can't eliminate them. Eynos says it's turned down expeditions it considered too dangerous, including a proposed trip to North Korea. It also declined to join OceanGate on Titan deep-sea expeditions because of safety concerns, including the submersible's carbon-fiber hull. Titan imploded near the wreck of the Titanic in June 2023, killing everyone onboard, including OceanGate's chief executive officer.

For all the risk, the appetite for firsts shows little sign of fading. Expedition leaders keep tabs on what remains undone, ready for clients looking for the next frontier. "If they can tell the story at the

dinner-party table and someone else can say, ‘Oh, I did that when I went to Antarctica,’ we haven’t really done our job,” Davies says.

For those who seek these experiences, there is, inevitably, the question of what’s next. There’s always another mountain to summit, ocean trench to explore or place to discover. After becoming the first person to reach the South Pole in 1911, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen wrote: “I cannot say — though I know it would sound much more effective — that the object of my life was attained. That would be romancing rather too bare-facedly.”

He still wanted to go to the North Pole.