



A chilly tent city

ON YOUR BUCKET LIST: A DATE WITH PENGUINS



THE LAST emperor

flight from the base camp, Whichaway, a sort of winter safari with heated tents. Other activities include treks through ice caves and tunnels, visits to nearby Adélie penguin colonies, ice and rock climbing, descents into crevasses and a night in an igloo.

In keeping with the fragile nature of this environment, this visit to the seventh continent promises zero impact, meaning everything is temporary and does not injure the land.

(kensingtontours.com)

The silhouette of a 3½-foot-tall male emperor penguin incubating the single egg produced annually by his mate is one of nature's most riveting images. And the only time you can experience this sight is between May and July in Antarctica. It is not a journey for the faint of heart or pocketbook, but is one of those things you might want to consider before heading off to greener meadows.

A decade ago, such trips were unheard of — the transportation logistics a nightmare, the costs prohibitive except for the likes of Branson or Winfrey. Today, travel company **Kensington Tours** offers the unique encounter with the giant penguins at Ekström Ice Shelf after the young have hatched. At this point, the chicks are so unafraid of humans they will waddle right up to you!

The excursion to the 6,000-strong emperor colony involves a 2½-hour



TAILORMADE

If you love to eat well and dream of combining fabulous food with the perfect trip, **Tasting Places** will do all the footwork so you can linger over your tapas and Rioja.

Tours can be arranged to just about anywhere your gourmet heart desires. Fancy meeting the head chef? Done. Dying to get the inside story on that not-open-to-the-public family vineyard? They'll be welcoming you with open arms — and bottles. In Thailand, for example, you can even prepare a meal for local monks and learn about Buddhist traditions.

With more than 17 years logged in the travel biz establishing contact with renowned food experts, the three culinary czarinas who run the company personally ensure every journey is tailored to perfection, whether your penchant is for the Far East or Europe (tastingplaces.com).



ALL ABOARD, MATE

Heading Down Under? One of the most inspiring ways to see the country is by rail. The newest addition to the **Great Southern Rail** (GSR) private train service is The Southern Spirit, which travels across the country each year beginning in January for two months, with whistle stops in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

Forget skinny public berths — The Southern Spirit's private cabins come with double beds, 24-hour cabin service and plenty of picture windows for taking in the breathtaking scenery.

Meanwhile, The Ghan, the venerable train that chugged into existence 81 years ago (and was named after the Afghan camel drivers who once traversed the country), is also part of the GSR. Its twice-weekly journey runs from Darwin to Adelaide, cutting through the Red Centre (gsr.com.au).