Fiona Harper | Tuesday, April 24, 2012 Get back to nature — without sacrificing the creature comforts. Image: Thinkstockphoto

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What happens when you tire of the discomfort and uncertainty of backpacking but still crave the freedom of independent travel? Perhaps in your carefree past, time was your friend, when you had the luxury of hitting the road indefinitely: a year or two guided by wanderlust and serendipity. With a fistful of travellers cheques, in the days before

ubiquitous ATMs, and a well-thumbed guide book that doubled as a pillow, your backpack was your constant

companion, accompanied by a vague plan to 'see the world'. Today, you still want to explore, dream and discover those off the beaten places, immersing yourself in a culture or wild landscape, but, hitting your 30s and 40s, find that

those cheap and cheerful carefree backpacking days are

Cashed up and time poor, rather than the backpacker you once were, you may well have become today's flashpacker. An independent traveller still intent on avoiding mass tourism, you're looking for a unique experience combined with creature comforts. As a

flashpacker, you're also likely to be more self indulgent than you were in those heady alcohol-fuelled couch-surfing days. Are you a flashpacker?

still intent on avoiding mass tourism, you're looking for a unique experience combined with creature comforts." Fiona Harper

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Poles apart when it comes to travel spend, the one thing backpackers and flashpackers have in common is a desire

a rapidly fading memory.

to experience the 'real' destination. If you can't travel without a constant connection on your laptop, iPad or smartphone to check work emails, or worry about what to wear to dinner after hiking into that remote, all-inclusive wilderness lodge, there's a good chance you've already made the transition to flashpacker status. Generally environmentally and culturally aware of the impact of travel, flashpackers are more likely to take shortcuts

to get the most out of their travel experience. Where once they may have travelled overland just for the hell of it, now they're more likely to travel by air, dropping smack bang into the middle of their adventure for instant immersion. Flashpackers are likely found taking hiking or cycling trips (sometimes called glamping), on remote wildlife viewing

safaris or kayaking and sailing traditional vessels through far-flung island archipelagos. Often, their travels have an environmental, conservation or cultural focus, with plenty of outdoorsy activities to maintain gym-toned bodies. Easily identifiable by sturdy outdoor shoes showing little wear and waterproof jackets of a named brand, they don't

mind spending up when it comes to enhancing the experience. The ubiquitous backpack has most certainly been replaced by a waterproof duffle bag with retractable wheels. Oh, there's also a certain street cred inherent when they return to the office, casually drop into water cooler

New Zealand, long the destination for Aussie hikers and campers, offers plenty of flashpacking opportunities. Hiking,

Flashpacker destination spotlight: New Zealand

conversations tales of their latest wilderness adventure.

or "tramping" as the Kiwis call it, the Queen Charlotte Track in the Marlborough Sounds is a typical example. Seventy-one kilometres of stunning scenery starting at Ship Cove in the north, much of the track runs along the ridge

line, offering dreamy views across bottle-green bays, coves and inlets edged by dense forest. With access to the vast sounds predominantly by foot or water taxi, and little populated beyond sporadic bachs (holiday homes), lodges are dotted along the trail. Weary feet will find relief at five-star lodge Bay of Many Coves, the inhouse spa being the perfect reward after 15 or

trek. Furneaux Lodge, No Road Inn, and Te Mahia Bay Resort are others along the track worthy of a night's rejuvenation.

Another flashpacker destination: South Africa If getting up close and personal with wildlife is more your thing, South Africa offers luxury game viewing camping,

glamping-style, enticing flashpackers onto game reserves. Tanda Tula Safari Camp in Timbavati Reserve, part of

Big Five, spending nights in a hide beside a water hole.

Permanently pitched tents beside the riverbed come with claw foot baths, king beds and a breakfast in bed delivery service. Safari Camp is the first to offer overnight walking safaris, where guests tread the same ground shared by the

Outdoor showers, crisp linen concealed beneath wispy mosquito nets combine with gourmet meals cooked over open flames. Armed sentries keep the wildlife from getting too close while guests sleep accompanied by screeching

Two more for the road Canada too is finding itself a popular destination for cashed-up flashpackers. With enough wilderness area to satisfy

the most jaded outdoorsy person, the remote northern provinces of Nunavut and Manitoba are worth checking out.

cultural immersion.

baboons, roaring lions or laughing hyenas.

With a favourable exchange rate against Aussie dollars, floatplanes are the transport mode of choice to drop into lodges such as Seal River Lodge on the shore of Hudson Bay. Tracking polar bears by foot, spotting beluga whales

by air or waiting patiently for inquisitive caribou to trot towards your picnic spot on the tundra make up the day's

activities. Pre-dinner drinks are taken curled up on comfy leather sofas before an open fire with plenty of red wine to warm core body temperatures. An emerging market for flashpackers, Papua New Guinea has a couple of offerings sure to pique travellers' adventurous spirits. Islanders have long moved between islands using traditional sailing canoes known as silau: fully guided silau journeys through the Louisiades are flagged for 2012. In the meantime, extended sea kayak voyages via

waterfront villages of New Ireland's protected lagoons with No Roads Expeditions combine all day paddling with

While many flashpackers find themselves short on time, exploring by kayak, foot, indeed even sea plane, allows one to become instantly, fully immersed in the experience. No longer is there the need to suffer the tedium of long bus rides or infrequent train or ferry schedules. Sure, you'll dig a little deeper into your pockets than you did as a twentysomething. But really, what's the point of holding down that responsible job if there isn't a little room for a self indulgent getaway every now and then?

User comments

I'm not quite at Flashpacker stage nor am I full Backpacker, I'd say I'm more a "Quaterpacker!" I have a foot in both camps, dependent on the trip... The guy in the picture is really hot. If I ever saw him like that in the bush... I can't guarantee I'd keep walking

Related story: Backpacking for grown-ups

haha. *** images keep entering my head LOL. Photo looks like Kambah Pool in canberra - flashpacker indeed!

20kms on the trail. Overlooking a quiet cove inhabited by bottlenose dolphins, a fine dining restaurant, gorgeous Cheap flights apartments with plush king beds and a relaxed ambience should rejuvenate most hikers midway through a four-day the Greater Kruger National Park is home to Save the Elephants South Africa conservation program.

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