

SPECIAL
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THE GOLD LIST 2018

THE WORLD'S
MOST EXTRAORDINARY
EXPERIENCES



PLUS OUR ALL-TIME FAVOURITE PLACES TO STAY

WORD OF MOUTH

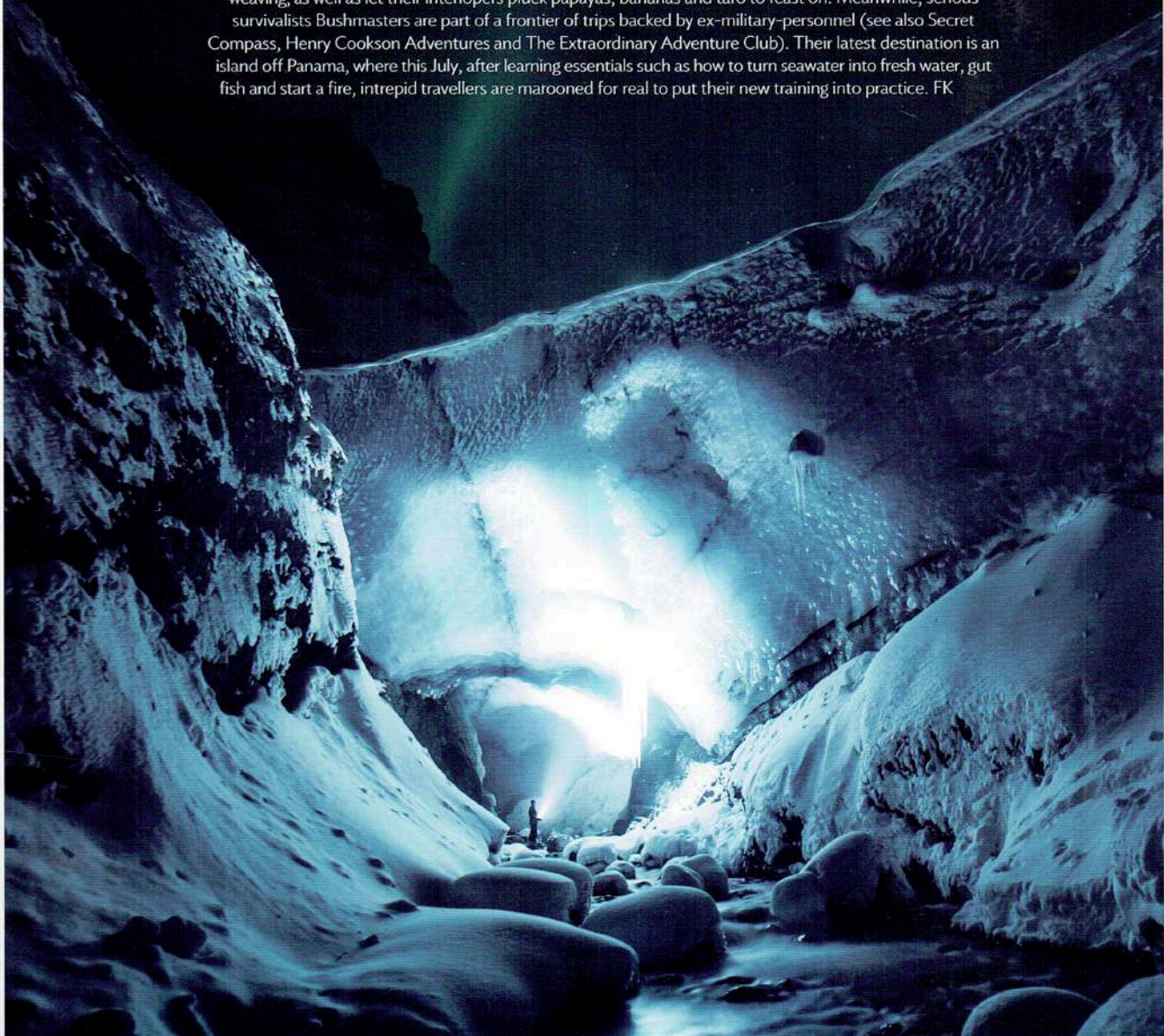
THE FUTURE CLASSICS

EDITED BY FIONA KERR

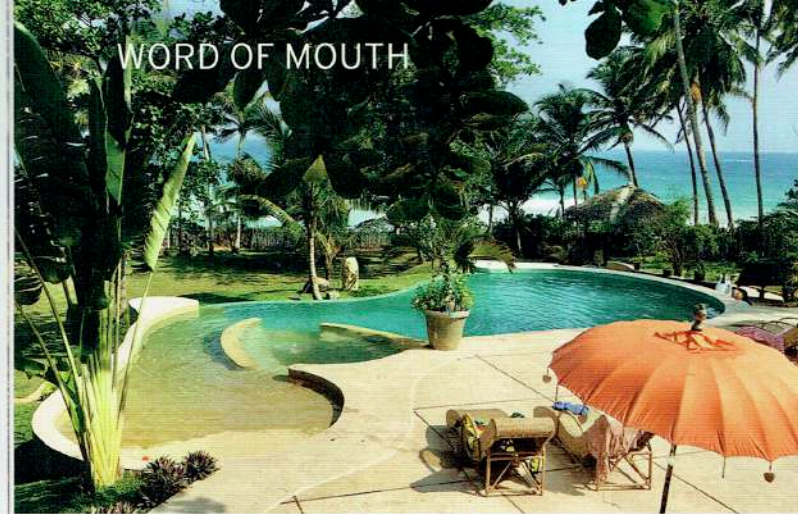
THE ULTIMATE DISCONNECT SURVIVAL TRIPS

We've holed up in cabins, checked into silent retreats and even bedded down in copper-lined rooms to block phone signals. It seems the more switched-on our lives become the harder we strive to be cut off from them. Now new journeys are enabling escape by presenting the most primal of distractions: survival. The latest service from boundary-pushing adventure outfit Black Tomato does just that. Called Get Lost, it lets travellers choose only the terrain they want to be stranded in – polar, desert, jungle, coastal or mountain. Once kitted out, skilled up and dropped in the destination, the challenge is to get through a series of checkpoints using just wits and navigational tools (although a background support team will constantly monitor progress). This could mean exploring Iceland's Gigjökull glacial caves (*pictured*), digging shelters and fashioning makeshift snow shoes, or mountain biking through the Sahara and learning from local nomads how to bake bread in the hot sands. For

a more *Cast Away* experience, Oceania Expeditions will leave wannabe Crusoes on the remote island of Kabakon in Papua New Guinea. Fortunately, neighbouring villagers will swing by to teach spear fishing and weaving, as well as let their interlopers pluck papayas, bananas and taro to feast on. Meanwhile, serious survivalists Bushmasters are part of a frontier of trips backed by ex-military-personnel (see also Secret Compass, Henry Cookson Adventures and The Extraordinary Adventure Club). Their latest destination is an island off Panama, where this July, after learning essentials such as how to turn seawater into fresh water, gut fish and start a fire, intrepid travellers are marooned for real to put their new training into practice. FK



PHOTOGRAPH: BLACK TOMATO



THE NEW ISLAND PIN-UP SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has reached tipping point with a flurry of world-class hotel openings that are almost all home-grown. Tri and Cape Weligama kicked off its comeback in 2015, while Fort Bazaar and Chena Huts took it up a notch the following year. On the fringes of leopard-spotted Yala National Park, Resplendent Ceylon's Wild Coast Tented Lodge, from the same group as Cape Weligama, brings 28 canvas rooms to the edge of a beach. Other local names expanding their hordes include Taru Villas, which has just relaunched its old favourite boutique retreat Taprobana as The Muse, a nine-room hideaway in beachy Bentota. Hip homes are also emerging, including beautiful villa Meda Gedara on the south coast near Dickwella, with seven bedrooms, a yoga shala by the cricket pitch and a waterslide into the pool. And there's more to come: Alila at Lake Koggala and beach huts from Cantaloupe near Midigama are rumoured for later this year.

Once just a gateway, Colombo is on the rise too with game-changing restaurants emerging: South-East-Asian street food at Monsoon on cool Park Street Mews and buzzy Botanik, a rooftop bistro from Colombo-born chef Rishi Naleendra. The capital also has a growing art scene and design stores that are at last turning it into a destination in its own right. EMMA BOYLE

Clockwise from top: the pool at Meda Gedara and a spiral staircase; the bamboo dining pavilion at Wild Coast Tented Lodge; the sitting room at Meda Gedara; Taru Villas' Lighthouse Street retreat in Galle Fort and the group's Rock Villa in Bentota

PHOTOGRAPH: TIM EVAN-COOK

GOLDEN TICKET 'DRIVE ALONG THE STUNNING UTAH/ARIZONA BORDER AND YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE ON ANOTHER PLANET' MATTHEW BUCK, PHOTOGRAPHIC EDITOR