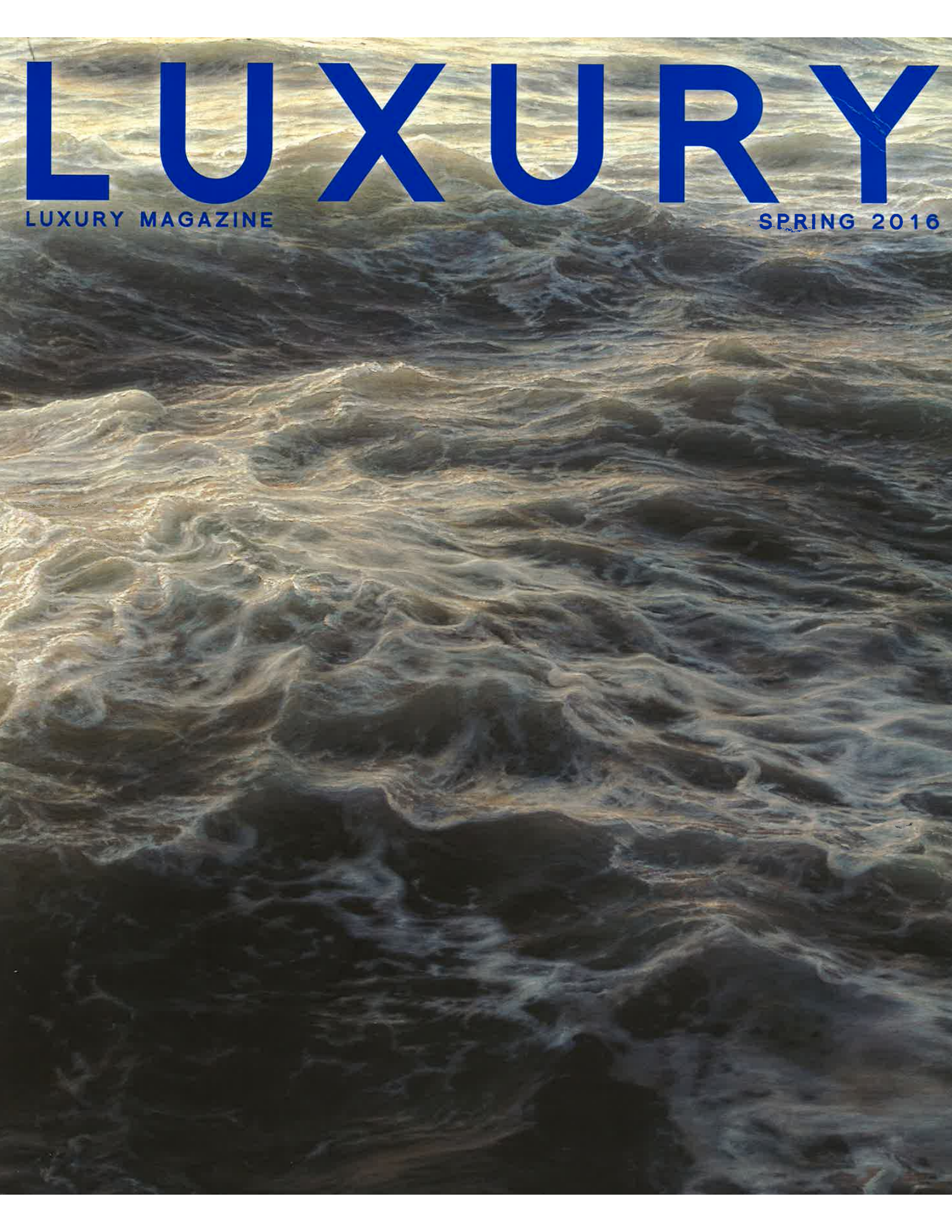


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Be Cool: GO YACHTING IN THE GLACIERS

Visa: A valid passport is required; reciprocity tax of \$160 for entry through Argentina. Travel insurance is a must.

Plane Reading: *The Worst Journey in the World*, Apsley Cherry-Garrard.

Souvenir: Striped “love socks” from Tristan da Cunha, “remotest island in the world,” with a population of less than 300.

It's barely breakfast time, and you're climbing Salisbury Plain's bursts of tussac grass toward the sight of 100,000 king penguins, each crowned with a shocking plume of orange, nesting together and flanked by monumental glaciers. For such explorations of undisturbed fauna and whites against blues, elements against elements, “amazing” and “once-in-a-lifetime” aren't just lip service to hyperbolic superlative.

Undoubtedly a more civilized way to channel one's inner Sir Edmund Hillary, veteran French outfitter Ponant is launching its new yacht *Le Lyréal* into these waters with a sub-Antarctic spring route (March 4–25, 2017; from \$10,610; en.ponant.com). The intimate vessel—outfitted with your own swish parkas, Zodiac boats, and an onboard spa—sets sail from the southernmost tip of Argentina to Cape Town, South Africa, by way of South Georgia, the Falkland Islands, and a series of speck-on-a-map volcanic islands.

Still, purists might opt for a Certs-commercial polar plunge into Antarctica, a continent dedicated to science since a 1959 international treaty. Ply the ice-blue glaciers of the Drake Passage—convergence point of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Southern oceans; see the placid reflection of ice caps in the Weddell Sea and the historic defunct whaling station at Deception Bay. And don't leave without the ultimate souvenir: mailing a postcard from the tiny British station in Port Lockroy—the only post office in all of 5.4 million miles. ▷



Misty Mountain: *SICHUAN, CHINA*

Visa: \$140, 30-day tourist visa available by visiting the Los Angeles, San Francisco, or New York Chinese consulate in person.

Plane Reading: *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-tzu, trans. Stephen Mitchell.

Souvenirs: Sichuan peppercorns, and design wares at the underground bookstore Fang Suo Commune to put them in.

As the audience nibbles Sichuan wontons, the Sichuan Opera mystifies with its elaborate makeup and *biàn lian*—changing faces—a repeated split-second switch of the mask. Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province, shifts like that, too. One minute, it's sesame candy; the next, your mouth is sizzling from mapo tofu; haggard vendors drink tea and play mahjong at the Song Xian Qiao antiques market, while at The Temple House (from \$230; thetemplehousehotel.com) cocktails are engineered in sultry, neo-deco surroundings. Traditional against modern is certainly the cashmere-clad scene at the latest property by Swire Hotels. Think of it as Asian hospitality's most urbane version of a design fair—fashioned around the shell of Bitieshi, a restored Qing dynasty courtyard (and not without great soaking tubs in the suites). Here in this burgeoning fashion city, people-watching is a legitimate activity at Jinji Alley and the more edgy U37 warehouse complex, and hundreds of heritage teahouses are intended for lingering, among them Mi Xun, which borders the tony Taikoo Li shopping complex. All around, electronic symphonies of texts and email alerts chime in unison. Shouldn't you be doing something, too? Perhaps not. In laid-back Sichuan, as the Taoist saying goes, to do nothing is to do everything.

Another changing face is city versus country. Pops of gold from the ginkgo trees highlight an overwhelming misty gray down the Western Sichuan Expressway toward UNESCO-protected Mount Qing Cheng and its Six Senses resort (from \$291; sixsenses.com). With plenty of personality, the removed mini-village has tapped quiet naturalism with a flowing series of paths and bridges connecting pale-wooded villas, open-air pavilions and waterfalls, an exceptional spa, organic working farm, paddy, and mushroom hut. Rising above the bamboo is the birthplace of Taoism and home to the country's network of panda breeding stations. Tourists who arrive early enough often have these irresistibly cute giants all to themselves. A multicourse Asian breakfast including local dandan noodles fuels a hike up the steep-stepped front mountain that crescendos through dozens of Taoist temples toward a giant pagoda set in the clouds. Meanwhile, ancient Dujiangyan town is best experienced at night, when the old temple, bar-lined streets, and rushing waters of the ancient irrigation system are illuminated in gold and cerulean neons; in season, fresh kiwi and karaoke fill the main square as friends crowd food stalls, daring each other with chili-fried scorpion on a stick. Yes, there's a numbing, tingling paresthesia in the mouth and lips that accompanies the incendiary floral aromatics of a Sichuan peppercorn, and to visit here is to try it. With a strong language barrier and often no menus, leaving the gastronomic tour to the pros—in this case, the Six Senses experience guides—is a shortcut to the best plum wine or pork in chili oil. To do nothing is ... to taste everything. ▷



Photos: (Top left) Michael Weber; (bottom left) Kriston Pascal; (right) Philippe Le Boeuf; (bottom right) Philippe Le Boeuf



Top row from left: The Temple House; The Six Senses Qing Cheng Mountain. Bottom row: Chengdu.

