

AFAR

AFAR Advisor



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I first met Marne Sheldon and her son, Ryan Sheldon, in Marrakech, Morocco, at the annual [Pure Life Experiences](#) travel conference, and their passion for Alaska's natural beauty enchanted me so much that I've been dreaming about a trip to their property, Sheldon Chalet, ever since. Along with Robert Sheldon—Marne's husband and Ryan's father—they run this exclusive-use retreat perched atop a nunatak (a rocky peak surrounded by ice) on the Ruth Glacier, deep in Denali National Park. The lodge was built as an homage to the original vision by the late Don Sheldon, Robert's father, a legendary bush pilot who, in 1966, constructed a small mountain shelter on the glacier for adventurers passing through (it still stands today).

When I heard that adventure travel specialist Cari Gray recently returned from a stay there, I wanted to find out more about the guest experience and how it caters to her clients' needs. Gray, who designs bespoke luxury trips for active travelers through her company, Gray & Co., sees Sheldon Chalet as part of a larger trend: buyout-only retreats in off-the-map destinations that offer comfort alongside unforgettable adventures.

“Many of our savvy active travelers now want to explore farther-flung locations, having been to so many of the usual suspects. Thankfully, there are often great hotels and lodges in these remote locales,” says Gray. “Exclusive-use properties are on the rise and are increasingly a popular way to stay, especially for extended families and friends.”

Gray shares her take—but I'd love yours, too. Scroll to the end to share what trends you're seeing among your clients.



Name: Cari Gray

Title: Founder and CEO, [Gray & Co.](#)

Where based: Santa Monica, California



Hotel: [Sheldon Chalet](#)

Location: Ruth Glacier, Denali National Park, Alaska

Access: Only by helicopter or plane from Talkeetna. From \$32,000 a night, all-inclusive buyout, for up to 10 guests

What's your one-sentence pitch if a client asks, "Why this hotel?"

While there are many wonderful wilderness lodges in Alaska, none match Sheldon Chalet's unique location atop a glacier. It's Alaska at its most raw and beautiful.

How does this hotel reflect the larger trends in luxury active travel that you're seeing?

Sheldon Chalet epitomizes the shift toward exclusive, immersive experiences in remote locations. Its unique setting atop a glacier, combined with the rich history of the Sheldon family, offers guests an unparalleled adventure. The inclusion of a signed copy of *Wager with the Wind*, Don Sheldon's memoir [written by James

Greiner], adds a personal touch that connects guests to the area's legacy.

What kind of traveler is this hotel best for?

It's ideal for adventurous travelers wanting to disconnect and engage deeply with the natural world. There's Wi-Fi, but many guests opt not to use it so they can feel completely present. The intimate setting is also ideal for families or groups looking for a private retreat. The lodge is open year-round; the winter season focuses on backcountry skiing, glacier trekking, sledding, snowmobiling, and northern lights viewing, while the warmer months offer such activities as glacier trekking, glacier pool swimming, and ice and rock climbing.

What are the accommodations like?

The chalet has five bedrooms, all offering panoramic views of the landscape, including Mount Denali and the Ruth Glacier. Each room is equipped with blackout curtains to deal with the omnipresent daylight in summer.

What was a standout meal you had on the property?

Meals are a highlight, with chefs preparing healthy, family-style dishes in the open kitchen. All ingredients are flown in, allowing for complete customization based on guests' preferences. The generously sized seafood platters, in particular, were memorable.

Who was the secret weapon on staff?

There's nothing Marne Sheldon can't orchestrate. With the help of concierge Elise MacMillan, she oversees every aspect of the lodge's operation. Elise is onsite to assist with everything from outdoor gear fittings to helicopter scheduling.

Any challenges or surprises other advisors should know about?

The weather plays a big role in getting to—and from—the chalet. It's important to include buffer time. As a backup, the Sheldons have a lovely house in the heart of Talkeetna where guests can stay while they wait for favorable conditions. It's a good opportunity to go dogsledding in the nearby forest (and cuddle some puppies).

What part of the hotel is most likely to wow your clients?

The panoramic deck, the cozy sauna (roll in the snow after!), the interiors (an amazing soapstone chimney), the high-quality bedding, and the extensive range of adventure gear available in various sizes.

Happy wandering,

Jennifer Flowers

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