

SEAS THE DAY

As CEO and Founder of luxury small ship cruise company Aqua Expeditions, Francesco Galli Zugaro talks about his thirst for soft adventure, his love for Italy and appreciating life's special moments through slow travel. As told to Katrina Holden.

LT: What did you learn about the world through travel as a child?

Travel is there to open our eyes, and it won't wait for us. We need to have a desire to see the world and absorb the teachings that travel provides. Having been born in Switzerland and lived in Italy, Germany, Cyprus, Israel, UK, US, Ecuador, Peru and Singapore, I can safely say that travel has shaped me into the person I am today. It's increased my understanding, open mindedness and empathy towards diverse cultures, and my eagerness to learn more.

LT: What's your idea of a perfect holiday?

For me it's all about soft adventure. I love to explore and go off the beaten track in search of unique wildlife and settings.

My holidays used to be at a much faster pace. Now, it's about slowing it down and making those special moments last longer and enjoying the setting and experiences; appreciating the places I choose to explore and absorbing it all, while maintaining my lifestyle — staying active and connected, eating well, but at a reduced pace. Most importantly, a perfect holiday for me is having my wife and three kids by my side.

LT: What are some of your most favourite travel memories?

My favourite travel memory is my first safari when I was seven years old. Since then, I've been on 16 safaris, each experience just as remarkable and awe-inspiring as the last.

I consider myself extremely lucky to have visited 80 countries, but I always come back to Italy. It holds a very special place in my heart and some of my most cherished travel memories. Sitting under

the stars on the open water on any of our ships, looking up at the constellations and thinking how fortunate I have been to see such amazing places in the world.

LT: How do you try to travel sustainably and responsibly?

As I travel often for work, in order to stay close to my crew and team I prioritise two things — carbon offsetting my flights where possible, and always making sustainable and considered choices when I'm on the ground.

Aqua Expeditions cares about setting a standard in responsible travel in the destinations in which we operate. We do so from the ground up, beginning with the design, furnishing and function of our vessels.

LT: Tell us about an unforgettable dining moment

My most memorable dining experience took place on the Island of Salina, part of the Aeolian Islands off the north coast of Sicily. My family and I stayed on a private cliff-top wine estate called Capofaro while on holiday there. One evening, we took a stroll into the town of Malfa and had a show-stopping pasta experience at a local restaurant. This dish was called Pasta Al Fuoco — it was a simple and elegant plate comprised of local tomatoes and chili peppers sauteed in olive oil, topped with hard, aged ricotta — the perfect meal to share with loved ones. In fact, we enjoyed it so much we cancelled all dinner reservations during our time there and continued to return to this charming restaurant each night, and even enticed other guests at our hotel to join us.

LT: What has been one of your favourite and most authentic travel experiences so far?

As far as authentic experiences go, I would have to say solo biking in the Damaraland Desert in Namibia is up there. I travelled from Windhoek via the Angola border towards the Skeleton Coast and completed 370km of biking, with free-roaming elephants and lions — it was an awesome experience and one I want to replicate with my family one day.

LT: What are three luxury items you always pack to take with you on your travels?

My custom-made leather backpack from French People Design in Ho Chi Minh City; my calf leather document case from Chez Dédé in Rome; and my Rolex Skydweller for dual timekeeping between Singapore and Lima.

LT: How does the guest experience onboard an Aqua Expeditions ship differ from other luxury, small-ship cruise companies?

We pride ourselves on offering guests an incredibly tailored experience from the moment they step onboard our ships. A unique 1:1 crew-to-guest ratio ensures all their needs are catered to with a highly personalised service. We team up with world renowned chefs to curate menus that utilise the freshest, locally sourced ingredients from each destination. Our state-of-the-art vessels offer guests a contemporary space to retreat to after a day spent in the great outdoors. Our program of authentic, tailor-made soft adventures offered on all itineraries also sets us apart.



TOP LEFT Francesco Galli Zugaro.

ABOVE Francesco takes a skiff ride from *Aqua Blu*.

LEFT On board *Aqua Mekong*.