THE TIMES

JJ Martin: 'I always take crystals and little talismans away with me'

The founder of luxury fashion and homeware brand La DoubleJ on taking ayahuasca in Brazil, why she loves Bali and her favourite restaurants in her adopted home of Milan



JJ Martin is creative director and founder of the luxury fashion and homeware brand La DoubleJ, known for its bold prints and bright colours. Raised in California, she moved to Italy in her twenties, where she was a fashion journalist for 15 years. In 2024 she launched The Sisterhood, a community for spiritual events from crystal healings to meditations, both online and in person. She lives in Milan.

I'm guided almost singularly by what I'm calling transcendental travel. It means that I go on trips where I can have a spiritual experience or an energetic connection with the land, sacred sites and traditions that are there, usually, from indigenous people.

One place where I've been going a lot for that is Egypt. I've co-hosted three or four trips there, which are guided spiritually by a high priestess called Dee Kennedy. We're going to many of the same places that other tourists go, such as the Temple of Man at Luxor and the Isis temple at Philae — but we're renting out the temples privately and going in at 4am when no one is there. Then we're practising ceremonies, rituals and traditions that have been passed down from the ancient Egyptian mystery school, which is an esoteric practice that's not common at all in modern-day Egypt. It's the woo-woo of the woo-woo. It's beautiful.



Martin hosts spiritual events in, Luxor, Egypt

GETTY IMAGES

In Brazil, I had an incredible two-week experience with the indigenous people of the Huni Kuin tribe and the Santo Daime. It's a religious order where they ingest ayahuasca (an age-old hallucinogenic brew) as the Eucharist. So instead of the body and blood of Christ — you know, wafer and wine — we were drinking ayahuasca and it was part of the religious experience. The church that I went to was in Rio Branco, in the state of Acre, which is in the far west corner of Brazil. Very remote. It was the most blissful experience of my life, total pain and total ecstasy occurring simultaneously and an awareness that this was what true love really is.

My travel low point? On that same trip, I took a boat journey to the tribe's headquarters in the middle of the Amazon. The boat was small and it had 15 people on it. No beds, no chairs, no bathrooms, and we were on it for three days with a motor that sounded like a jackhammer, eight hours a day. I thought I was going to lose my mind.

The ayahuasca is always teaching something, and this was an example of the fact you don't even need to drink the tea to be put in that place of serious spiritual awakening. No phone service, no clean water, no fruit. We just ate whatever meat they had and yuca — that's all we ate for two weeks straight. I'm a vegetarian, for God's sake! I totally ate the meat, though... I thought I was going to die.



Martin's trip down the Amazon was a serious spiritual awakening

ALAMY

Growing up we would spend every August in a place called Pine Grove, which is on a mountain above Napa. My dad was extremely outdoorsy: hunter, fisherman, camper. We would fish for crawdads in the creek by ourselves, grabbing them with our hands. It was very hokey; we would play bingo every night. It was not chic at all but we had a cabin and it was really cute.

I spent a lot of time in Bali from 2019-2021. I was going there because I met a qigong master who lived there and he became my boyfriend. It was such a remarkable time to be there, because it was Covid and no one was visiting. I've always tended to, just serendipitously, find local people that are very tapped into the spiritual scene. This boyfriend of mine knew all of the high priests in Bali, and we were going in the evening for private ceremonies in the water temples of Bali. It was phenomenal.

- More great hotels in Bali

My all-time favourite hotel in the world is the Bambu Indah in Bali. You could either stay in a Javanese wedding hut or you could stay in these extraordinarily designed bamboo constructions. It's beautiful, like living indoors-outdoors, and you're out in the middle of rice paddies with all the jungle around you.

I always bring a bag of crystals and little talismans away with me, so I can create a little pop-up altar with them. Every time I'm on a plane and I'm about to land in a new destination, I connect, I do prayers, I tap into the land and into the spirits. I ask for permission to enter from the guardians of the land. I'm telling you when you do something like this, you go in with so much more integrity and are in alignment with the place.



Pantelleria is a volcanic island off the coast of Sicily

GETTY IMAGES

I like to go to Pantelleria. It's a volcanic island off the southern coast of Sicily, famous for obsidian volcanic glass. But obsidian is known for kicking up shadows. So people go thinking they're going to have a great, exotic, gorgeous vacation — and they end up breaking a leg, getting into a car accident or fighting with their partner. All this stuff comes up. If you're not there with consciousness and with real alignment with what's happening there, it can really wreak havoc.

- Where to stay in Lake Como

One of the things that is so great about living in Milan is that Lake Como is 45 minutes from my front door. I really love Lake Como, it's an amazing place — Passalacqua is my home away from home. And not just because we did a design project there, but because it's that perfect small hotel that feels like a family home, and everything is just exquisite.

My favourite restaurant in Milan is Bice. I usually order the insalata tropicale and the sole, and they do an incredible sautéed broccoli with garlic and chilli. It's wonderful. I try to stay away from pasta — I'm over gluten, it's not really my thing. I also love La Latteria, which is a ten-table mom-and-pop shop: no reservations, ten things on the menu, no substitutions.

La Double J (ladoublej.com) launched The Energy Raising Program with Villa San Michele, A Belmond Hotel, Florence this spring. It includes three wellness spaces, an exclusive collection of Italian-made products, and a year-round programme of experiences