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**JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2024** 

UNPACKING THE SOON-TO-OPEN Bisate Reserve by Wilderwess

MODERN
EXCELLENCE AT
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CATALYST BY
NEWMARK

DUBAI'S TOP SPOTS FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

WHAT YOU'LL EXPERIENCE AT Morvocco's Tanneries

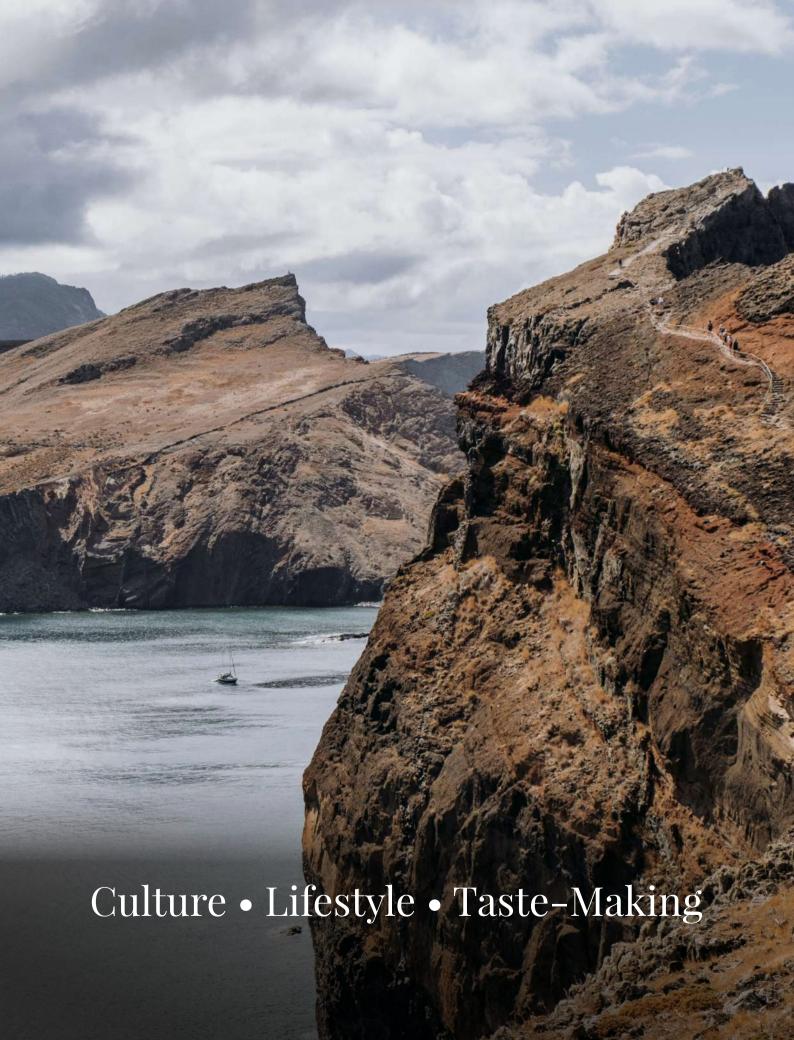
# PELUMINUBI

ON AN AUDACIOUS SOLO DRIVE FROM LONDON TO LAGOS

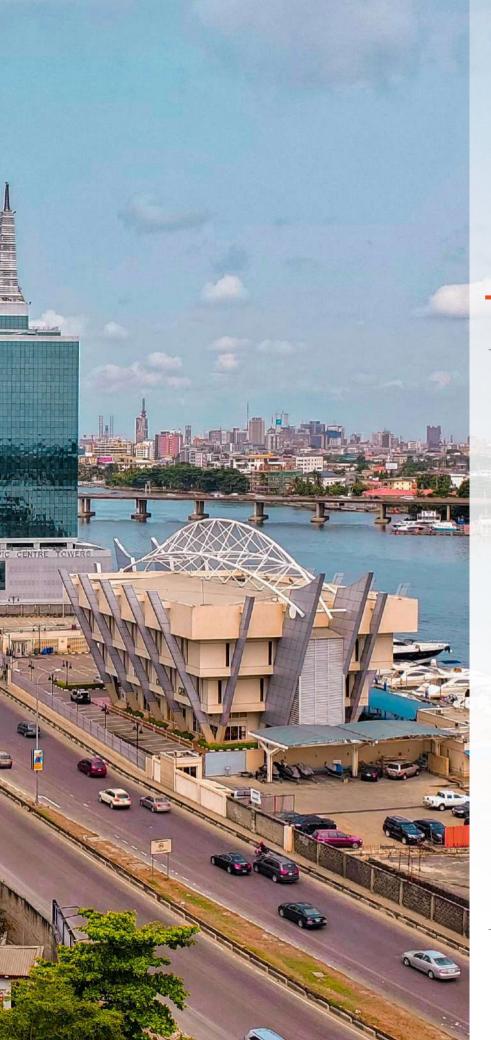


# Tryelssence

A NARRATIVES PR PUBLICATION









On The Cover: **PELUMI NUBI** 

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he New Year rolled in quicker than we anticipated it, and now it feels like we are playing catch up given the pace of the travel, hospitality and lifestyle scene. It doesn't matter where you are travelling to and from; airports are full, bus terminals are a hive of activity, and roads a testament to the ever-present need for humanity to move from one place to the next.

We thank all our readers for enriching us with warm feedback concerning our travels in the year we left behind. Big wins for the Travel Essence Family were the opportunities that came about as international hosted media to landmark events by iconic tourism boards and conventions out of Cape Town South Africa, the Kingdom of Eswatini and Guinea Tourism Board's La Saison Tourisque. With so many experiences we came away with, and contacts that have become colleagues we can turn to for deeper insights, the hope is that our journeys to bring you inspired content can only get better here on out.

2024 rolled in with trips back into Zimbabwe and South Africa to unpack more of the brands that are revolutionising how hospitality is being delivered to globally conscious, upwardly mobile travellers. The thrust for many of the organisations we interacted with, was the need to reinvest in iconic or heritage properties, unveiling modernised, refreshed interiors that match trends in design and local inspiration. We'll show you what's hot on the newly refurbished property scene this year.

With a mission to get back on the safari track soon, this year will be about unpacking the evolution of the travel landscape through ongoing trends, going inside new openings and of course, checking in with some of our friends who are relentlessly committed to community upliftment initiatives, wildlife preservation and natural resource protection within the landscapes they operate.

Back on the Dubai scene, the weather is remarkably enjoyable at the minute, and so for this Issue and perhaps the next, allow us to share what hidden gems lie a short drive away from your home for a little outdoor play or staycation time. With the Events scene also ramping up, and the Arabian Travel Market making its return, we'll have our ears to the ground to soak up trends and experiences to be on the lookout for in 2024.

Thank you for journeying with us still!

Gronne C. Mtengwa

Yours truly,



We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm and adventure. There is no end to the adventures we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open.

— JAWAHARIAL NEHRU





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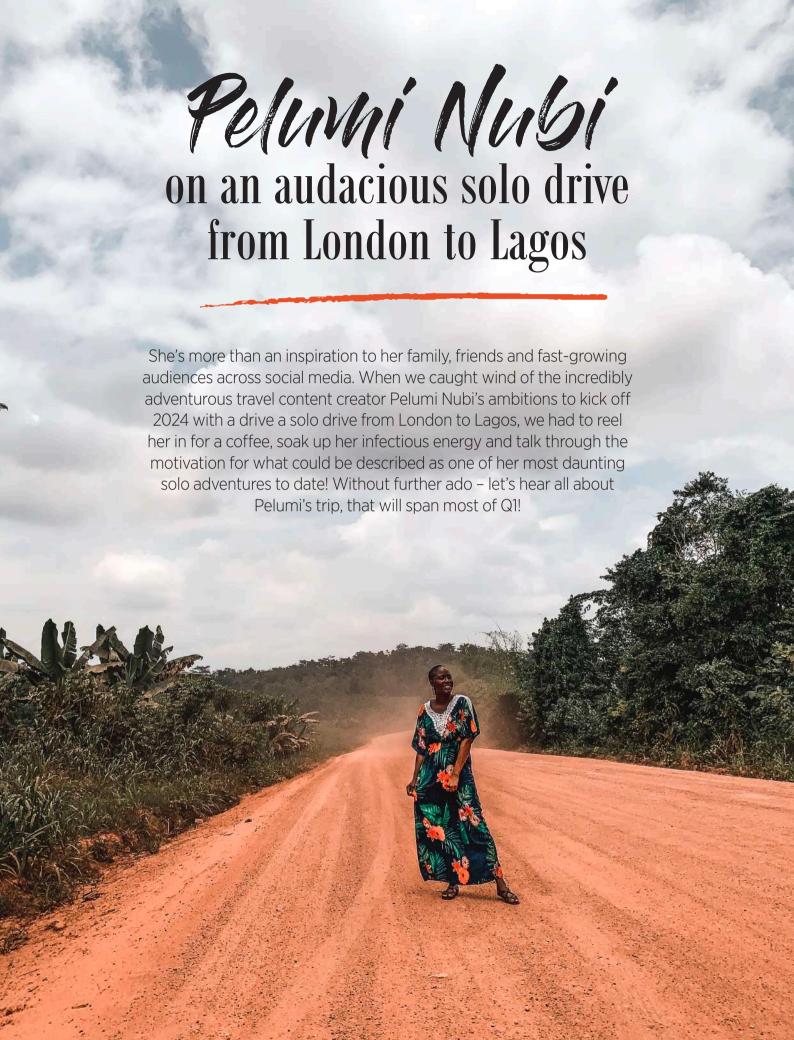
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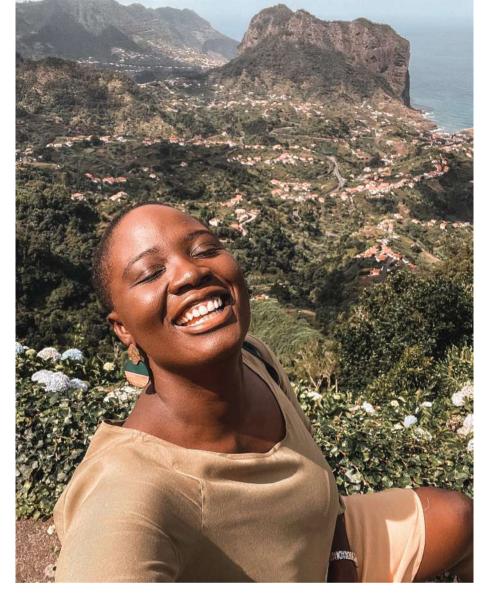
### 7. PLEASE SHARE WITH OUR READERS HOW YOU WOULD DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN 3 SENTENCES?

I am an adventurous spirit, fuelled by a deep passion for exploring the world's diverse cultures and landscapes, and always seeking to understand the heart of each place I visit. While inherently an introvert, I thrive in social settings, finding joy in connecting with people from all walks of life and sharing our stories. My adventures are more than personal journeys; they are a beacon, encouraging others to pursue their own paths of exploration and boldly step out of their comfort zones.

Z. TAKE US ON A REFLECTIVE JOURNEY THROUGH YOUR UPBRINGING. PLACE OF BIRTH? HOW MOVING TO THE UNITED KINGDOM CAME ABOUT, HOW IT SHAPED THE ESSENCE OF WHO YOU ARE TODAY AND YOUR DECISION TO RELOCATE TO DUBAI?

I was born in Lagos, Nigeria, a vibrant city that laid the foundation of my early life. My family's move to the United Kingdom was driven by my parents' aspiration for better opportunities, a decision that has greatly shaped my life, including the privilege of a passport that has facilitated my extensive travels. However, this relocation had its challenges. As a child in primary school, I faced bullying, often feeling like an 'other' due to my distinct accent and skin tone, which brought a keen awareness of my race and identity.

This led me to seek refuge in the school library, where I was drawn to travel books. These books planted a seed of curiosity and wonder about the world, which blossomed into a life of exploration. As soon as I was able, I embarked on backpacking





#### **COVER STORY • PELUMI NUBI**

adventures across Europe, and over time, my journey expanded to 80 countries and over 200 cities. There's an indescribable joy I find in being constantly on the go, discovering new places and cultures.

My move to Dubai marked the beginning of another exciting chapter. It wasn't just a change of scenery from the cold weather of the UK, but also a strategic decision for both personal and professional growth. For the first time in over two decades, it meant living in the same country as all my siblings, which was a heartwarming reunion. Dubai's vibrant energy, diverse networking opportunities, and its positioning as a global hub provide the perfect backdrop for my entrepreneurial pursuits. This city is now a new base from which I continue to explore the world and grow in ways I had always dreamed of.

ME'VE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF INTERACTING WITH YOU IN PERSON AND HAVE TO SAY, YOUR ENERGY IS INCREDIBLY INFECTIOUS. YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS AND THE COMMUNITY YOU'VE BUILT AROUND YOUR TRAVELS HAS BEEN ABLE TO GET DOSES OF PELUMI'S SENSE OF SPIRITED ADVENTURE. TAKE US THROUGH WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST TRIP THAT LED YOU ON THIS PATH TO DISCOVERING THE WORLD ONE COUNTRY AT A TIME?

Thank you for your kind words! My journey into the world of travel began with an undergraduate program at my university called 'Global Leadership,' which offered an opportunity to visit India. This trip was monumental for me; India, at that point, felt like a distant, almost unattainable dream. I didn't know anyone there, so the heavily discounted program made this experience accessible and exciting.

Upon arriving in New Delhi, I was struck by the stark contrast between the city I was experiencing, and the India often portrayed in the media. This realisation was pivotal. It sparked a curiosity in me about other destinations that might be misunderstood or stereotyped. I felt compelled to share my experiences on social media, aiming to demonstrate that travel can be safe, easy, and doable, especially for black women like myself.



The response was overwhelming. I received numerous messages from people thanking me for altering their perceptions about certain places, noting that their experiences were not at all what they had anticipated, both in terms of the destinations and the warmth of the local people. This trip was not just an adventure; it was a profound eye-opener to the joys and lessons that come with stepping out of my comfort zone and immersing myself in diverse cultures. It ignited my passion for discovering the world, one country at a time.

Interestingly, the journey came full circle when I was invited back to the same program to speak to new undergraduates, encouraging them to seize similar opportunities. It was a moment of deep reflection and pride, seeing how far I've come from being a participant to now inspiring others to embark on their own journeys of exploration.

YOU'VE SHARED WITH US THAT YOU HAVE SERIES OF ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO YOUR BELT, AND YET HAVE FOUND YOUR PASSION AND FULFILMENT DOING SOMETHING COMPLETELY NON-RELATED. SHARE WHAT THIS HAS BEEN LIKE FOR YOU; THAT IS CARVING YOUR OWN NON-CONVENTIONAL PATH TO LIVING LIFE?

Yes, indeed, my academic journey initially followed a traditional science path. I achieved a first-class degree in Biomedical Science and began a doctorate program in cancer research and human genetics. However, the year 2020 marked a profound period of reflection for me. The pandemic led to the closure of my lab and the loss of all my samples, prompting me to reevaluate my goals. No longer pursuing a doctorate, I asked myself what I truly wanted from life. Probably the hardest chapter of my life but you know the saying: 'Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny.' I found myself irre-





sistibly drawn to the idea of traveling; it emerged as a recurring theme, a source of immense joy and purpose.

Therefore, I made the decisive choice to fully commit to traveling, a passion that infuses my life with deeper meaning. I realised that life is too short not to pursue what genuinely fulfils us. It requires a daily commitment to follow my heart, even if it might not always make sense to others, and I am completely at peace with that decision. I've never been one to follow a conventional path, especially regarding career choices. To me, life should be fluid, a continuous adventure.

# 5. AND NOW, AFTER 80 COUNTRIES ACROSS 6 CONTINENTS, YOU ARE ADDING AN EPIC SOLO TRIP TO YOUR LIST OF ACHIEVEMENTS: A 3-MONTH LONG DRIVE FROM LONDON TO LAGOS? WHY THIS TRIP AND WHY NOW?

Whenever I'm asked about this epic journey, my immediate response is, 'Why not?' I wanted to undertake something truly brave, something that symbolically connects the two places I consider home and where I've spent significant time. This trip is essentially a journey from one home to another, with all the rich experiences in between. There are countless reasons why I'm embarking on this adventure. One of the foremost is the importance of representation. I hope that by seeing me undertake such a brave endeavor, others will be inspired to pursue their own bold ventures. And it doesn't necessarily have to be travel-related – it could be starting a business or leaving a toxic relationship.

We live in a world that often disqualifies us from new experiences, but it's even worse when we disqualify ourselves. So, I challenge that notion with 'Why not?'.

Regarding the timing, there's never a 'perfect' moment for such an endeavor. I chose now based on my savings and the ideal season to travel, avoiding the rainy season in the countries I'll be driving through. After a year of planning, the excitement is palpable, and I'm thrilled that this trip is finally happening.

AVID TRAVELLERS ACROSS THE WORLD'S MOST UNDERDEVELOPED TERRAINS WILL ATTEST TO HOW SCARCITY OF INFORMATION CAN MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO TRAVERSE THESE PLACES, ESPECIALLY BY ROAD. CAN YOU DETAIL WHICH LEGS OF YOUR TRIP YOU HAVE HAD TO RESEARCH IN DEPTH FOR LACK OF

#### **COVER STORY • PELUMI NUBI**

#### READILY AVAILABLE INFORMATION?

In preparing for my London to Lagos road trip, I encountered challenges in finding detailed information for several legs of the journey, as countries like Mauritania, Guinea, and Burkina Faso required extensive research due to their less-developed infrastructure and the scarcity of reliable online resources. Navigating these regions meant delving into travel forums, connecting with other travellers who have made similar journeys, and in some cases, consulting local guides for the most current information.

In Mauritania, for instance, understanding border crossing procedures and the condition of roads in the Sahara was crucial. Similarly, in Guinea and Burkina Faso, gathering information on road safety, potential areas to avoid due to political instability, and the availability of fuel and accommodations required thorough investigation. These countries, while rich in culture and natural beauty, do not have as much readily available travel information as more frequently visited destinations.

# 7. WHAT IS THE MESSAGE YOU ARE TRYING TO DRIVE HOME – FIRST TO YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AND ONTO YOUR TRAVEL COMMUNITY AND ASSOCIATES WITH THIS FEAT?

To my family and friends, your unwavering support and belief in me have been the wind beneath my wings. Your acceptance and encouragement have empowered me through every so-called 'crazy' adventure. Each step I take on these journeys, I carry a piece of your spirit with me. I can't thank you enough for inspiring me in ways that go beyond words.

To my incredible community, your enthusiasm and cheers have been my constant motivation. I am immensely grateful for the sense of belonging and encouragement you've provided. Your support has turned my solitary travels into a shared experience with a global family.

My message, both to those close to me and to the wider community, hinges on the power of belief: 'Whether you think you can, or you think you can't – you're right.' This journey, from London to Lagos, is a testament to that. It's about push-



ing boundaries, challenging self-imposed limits, and embracing the unknown with open arms.

I'd also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Osprey for their incredible support. Their commitment to making dreams a reality has been instrumental in turning my vision of this journey from London to Lagos into a tangible adventure.

I hope that this journey serves as a reminder that we are all capable of achieving extraordinary things. It's not just about reaching a physical destination, but about the journey of growth, discovery, and pushing beyond what we once thought was impossible. Together, let's lean into the belief that we are capable of greatness, and let that conviction guide us to explore, dream, and discover.

WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU TELL THE 10, 18 AND 30 YEAR OLD PELUMI NUBI, KNOWING WHAT YOU KNOW

#### NOW?

To my 10-year-old self, your boundless curiosity was a beautiful thing. The way you hid books from the library under your covers, allowing yourself to dream about distant lands and adventures, was the beginning of something special. And here's a little secret: all those places you dreamt of? You get to see them, experience them, and they are every bit as magical as you imagined.

To my 18-year-old self, standing at the crossroads of adulthood, brimming with questions and uncertainties, you might find this hard to believe, but you did figure it out. The answers were simpler than you thought; all you needed to do was listen to your heart's desires. You did the best you could in every moment, and for that, I am incredibly proud of you. You made choices, took chances, and each step, whether steady or stumbling, was a dance towards your destiny. Thank you for being brave, even when bravery felt like your only choice.

12 | Tryelessence

And finally, to my 30-year-old self, oh how my heart swells with excitement for what you're about to embark upon. They say life begins at 30, but your 20s were already amazing, so the anticipation for what's to come is immense. Keep trusting your intuition. Your story, uniquely yours, is a tapestry of trials, triumphs, and timeless lessons. Remember, you are 'born for such a time as this' (Esther 4:14). Embrace every moment, for your journey is just getting started.

#### 1. WHO AND WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Inspiration for me comes from the heartwarming stories of everyday resilience and courage that surround us. It's in the unwavering spirit of individuals who overcome daily challenges with grace and strength, much like the people in my own life who have supported me through every step of my journey. Their stories, often unsung but deeply impactful, remind me of the incredible strength that lies in human spirit.

What deeply inspires me is the compelling need to help others realise and pursue their own purposes in life. I firmly believe that my life's mission extends beyond my own adventures and accomplishments; it's about encouraging and empowering others to be relentless in the pursuit of their passions. This drive stems from a profound understanding that each of us harbours unique talents and dreams, and it's essential to nurture and act on them.

Seeing someone step out of their comfort zone, challenge their limitations, and embrace their true calling is incredibly rewarding. It's about igniting that spark of possibility in others, helping them see that their aspirations, no matter how lofty, are attainable. In doing so, I hope to create a ripple effect of positive change, where each person, empowered and purpose-driven, can then inspire and uplift other.

# 10. A DRIVE FROM LONDON TO LAGOS AS A SOLO TRAVELLER IS AS AUDACIOUS AS IT GETS! IF YOU WERE TO SPELL OUT A CAUSE FOR YOUR UPCOMING JOURNEY, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

This journey from London to Lagos is indeed audacious, and it stands for much more than the physical distance it covers. If I were to spell out a cause for this epic adventure, it would be





#### **COVER STORY • PELUMI NUBI**

to demonstrate the power of resilience and the beauty of cross-cultural connection. This trip is a celebration of human tenacity and the rich tapestry of cultures that make up our world.

At its core, the journey is about breaking down barriers – not just the physical borders between countries, but also the invisible walls of fear, uncertainty, and doubt that often hold us back. It's a testament to the idea that with determination and a positive mindset, even the most ambitious dreams can be realised.

Moreover, this drive is a narrative of cultural immersion and understanding. By traversing diverse nations and communities, I aim to showcase the interconnectedness of our global community, highlighting the similarities that bind us and the differences that enrich us. It's about fostering a sense of global citizenship and empathy, encouraging others to embrace new perspectives and experiences.

In essence, this journey is a call to action for anyone who has ever dreamed of undertaking their own grand adventure, whatever that may be. It's about inspiring others to step out of their comfort zones, to explore, to learn, and to connect – not just with the world around them, but also with the untapped potential within themselves.

## 11. WHAT HAS RELOCATING TO DUBAI WITHIN THE LAST YEAR DONE FOR YOUR PASSION FOR TRAVEL AND CONTENT CREATING?

Relocating to Dubai in the past year has been nothing short of transformative for both my passion for travel and content creation. Opting for a slow relocation process allowed me to gradually transition, giving me the time to adapt and make decisions at a pace that felt right for me. This approach has made the whole experience less overwhelming and more enjoyable.

In just a year, so much has changed, and it's almost surreal to reflect on the journey. Dubai has offered a unique platform for networking with like-minded individuals, which has been incredibly valuable. It's a melting pot of cultures and ideas, and being in this environment has significantly broadened my perspective.





The opportunity to connect with people from diverse backgrounds has enriched both my personal and professional life.

Being interviewed by this magazine is just one of the many exciting opportunities that have come my way since moving to Dubai. I've found a community here – a tribe of supportive and creative individuals who are not just friends but also collaborators in making my vision a reality. This sense of belonging and collective

effort is truly heartwarming.

Regarding content creation, Dubai has been a fertile ground for collaboration. Working alongside other creators has not only enhanced the quality of my content but has also provided a platform for exchanging ideas and learning new skills. The city's dynamic and visually stunning backdrop has been a boon for creating engaging and diverse content.

As I look forward to exploring more of



the Middle East after my London to Lagos road trip, I'm filled with excitement about the possibilities. This region offers a wealth of history, culture, and landscapes that I can't wait to delve into. I'm eager to bring these experiences to my audience, sharing not just the beauty of these places but also the stories and lessons they hold.

12. WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU HAVE FOR ALL THE WOMEN OUT THERE WHO ARE GRAPPLING WITH FACING ANY FEARS? WHAT ARE YOUR WORDS TO HELP THEM JUMPSTART OUT OF THEIR

#### RUT AND HOW HAS TRAVEL HELPED YOU FACE YOURS?

First, hi sis! I applaud you for even considering stepping out of your comfort zone. Recognizing the need for change and contemplating action is a significant first step, and it's incredibly important.

To all the women out there facing fears, grappling with uncertainties, or feeling stuck: know that you're not alone in these feelings. We all encounter moments of doubt and fear. My message to you is one of encouragement and empowerment. Remember, every great journey begins with a

single step, often taken when you feel the most apprehensive.

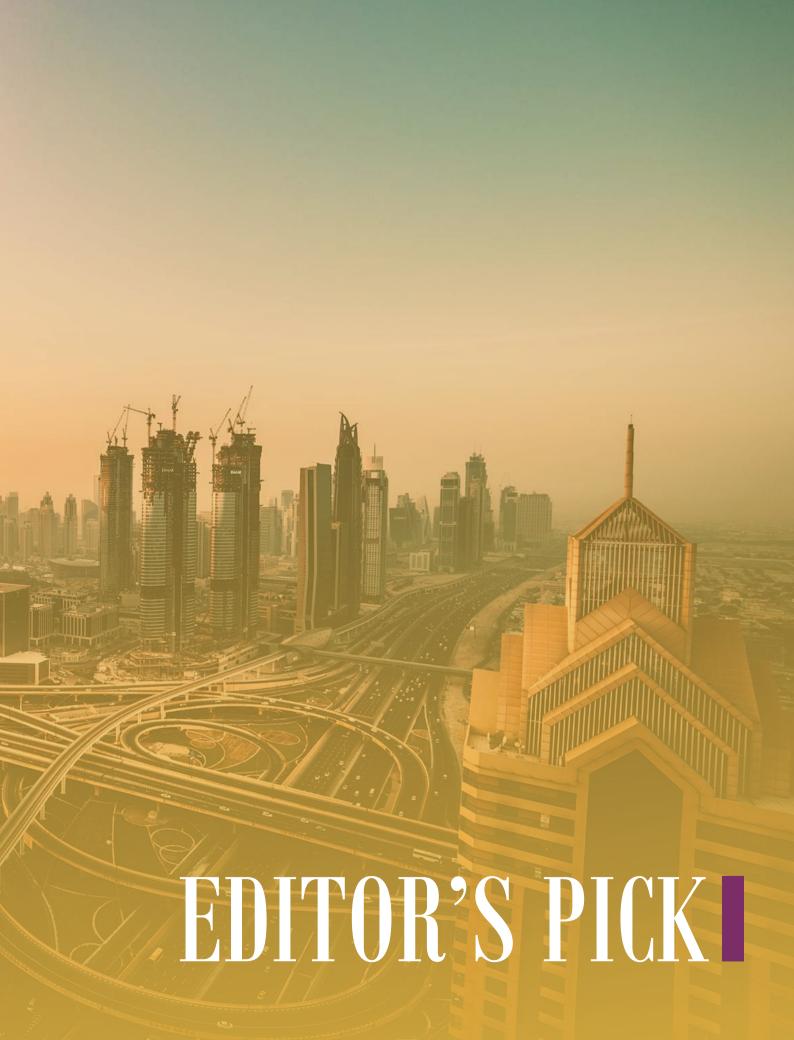
In facing your fears, start small. Set achievable goals that gently push your boundaries. Each small success builds confidence and momentum, making the next step a little easier. And remember, it's okay to be afraid. Courage isn't the absence of fear; it's the determination to move forward despite it.

Travel has been an incredible tool for me in facing my own fears. It has taught me resilience, adaptability, and the beauty of embracing the unknown. With each new place I've explored, I've learned more about myself – my strengths, my capabilities, and my passions. Traveling has a way of putting things into perspective, showing us that our fears, while valid, shouldn't confine our potential.



travelessencemag.com







# The Victoria Falls Hotel

120 years of documented historical moments and hospitality service excellence



# Now counting the months until its 120th anniversary, The Victoria Falls Hotel in Zimbabwe can look back on 12 decades of continuous operation as one Africa's best-known hospitality venues. This renowned hotel stands just a few hundred metres from one of the world's most stunning tourist attractions and is known today as not just a place to stay but as a stylish and graceful venue that offers contemporary facilities and amenities without giving up its charming historic feel.

#### **EDITOR'S PICK • THE VICTORIA FALLS HOTEL**

he spray from the falls rises hundreds of metres into the air above the hotel and the thunderous sound of the water crashing into the gorge below is a permanent accompaniment for visitors. The hotel stands atop the first gorge reaching out from the falls, with a superb view of the equally historic road and rail bridge spanning the gorge, linking Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Taking you back to bygone eras

The hotel was opened in June 1904, just before the planned Capeto-Cairo railway reached the Zambezi river. It was built by the railways authorities and became the first real tourist hotel in the territories being opened up north of the Limpopo river at the start of the 20th century. Within a year or so, the famed bridge across the Zambezi was completed, linking what is now Zimbabwe and Zambia with rail and, later, road access.

In its first 60 years it was the only hotel on the Zimbabwean side of the Zambezi, offering something different to the hotels on the northern side, in the town of Livingstone. It started off as a small establishment, with a handful of bedrooms and public areas, all in buildings made of corrugated iron. For much of its early life the visitors came only by rail, but road developments in the 1930s and, especially, the 1960s, made road travel easy and quick.

Air travel came in the period just before the Second World War, with the Flying Boat service from London to Cape Town stopping off on the Zambezi River, a spot nicknamed Jungle Junction by the pilots. Today, most arrivals are by air, by way of the modern Victoria Falls International Airport. Occasional visits by the famed Rovos Rail service linking South Africa and Tanzania bring guests by rail, echoing the earliest arrival process.

#### Luxury hospitality meet boundless nature

From the outset the hotel boasted a spectacular view into the gorges below the falls up to the bridge, across to the columns of spray rising continuously up from the falling waters. From early on it was recognised that this hotel should offer comfort to the point of luxury and a set of services of a superior nature. Its relationship to the railways has always been a feature, not the least because it has a private stairway to the railway station platform.

Activities for guests ranged from river cruises to game drives in the surrounding national parks, supplemented in recent decades by a huge set of offerings, from air and helicopter rides over the falls to bungee jumping off the bridge, and many more besides.

Since its modest beginnings, the hotel has grown, with fine accommodation and service wings being built over the decades to bring modernization and expansion to cope with increased numbers of guests. Two major wings reach out from the central base as what are known as 'hammerheads' – a design based on the old crossed rail-tracks logo of the forerunner of the National Railways of Zimbabwe. Other wings reach out from the entrance area and between the front and back blocks, and in the 1990s came the Stables Wing, a delightful addition that boosted bedroom and suite numbers to well over 150.

Unpacking the facilities

The hotel's flagship restaurant, The Livingstone Room, was built in 1917 and is today Zimbabwe's longest-running dining venue, where a dining experience is more than just a meal. Another restaurant, Jungle Junction, was built in the 1990s, standing where the old Africa spectacular dance show ran nightly from the 50s to the 80s and named for the old pilots' name for the stop on the London-Cape Town service. A third dining area is Stanley's terrace, the hotel verandah looking out across manicured lawns to the bridge.

Other facilities and amenities created over the 12 decades of operation include small executive conference rooms, a comfortable lounge, the attractive courtyard between the entrance and the lounge area, retail outlets, an art gallery run by a leading local artist and service areas like a hair salon, day spa and ground operators' desks. A delightful swimming pool area sits across the garden. A recent development was the re-creation of a cocktail bar just off the lounge, on the site where the country's first cocktail bar was opened in the early 1960s, adjacent to the lounge.

A unique and charming facility is Chapel of St Mary Magdalene, a tiny Anglican church facility that was opened in 1932 and to this day hosts regular services and special occasions such as weddings and baptisms. The Victoria Falls Hotel is thought to be only hotel in Zimbabwe with its own chapel and this feature is much cherished to this day. In April 1947 this chapel was used by Britain's King George VI and his family for Sunday service while staying at the hotel.

In recent decades many more hotels and accommodation facilities have opened in and around Victoria Falls town, but none can boast the history and scope of The Victoria Falls Hotel, which has for many years been known affectionately as 'the grand old lady of Victoria Falls.'

Today's General Manager, Farai Chimba, has been at the hotel for a decade and a half and has been GM since 2021, He's at the helm of the hotel at an exciting and demanding time: first, as it emerges from the massive



challenge of the Covid-related closure or partial operation, and, second, as it undertakes a major refurbishment programme designed to gear it to the needs of guests well into its second century.

#### The road towards a newly refreshed product

The refurbishment is being undertaken in phases, fitting in with budgetary, administrative and logistical requirements. The first phase is now completed and has seen re-opening of

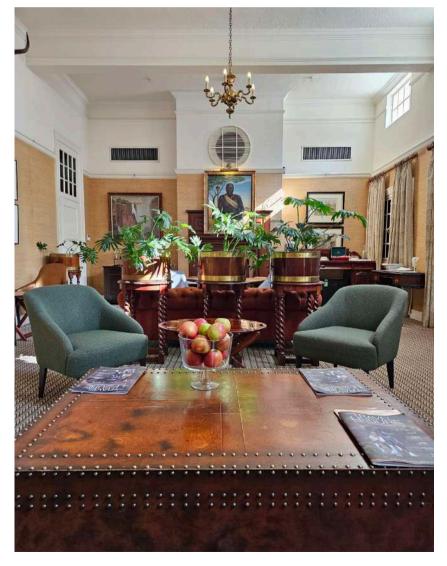
bedrooms and suites in what is known as the east 'hammerhead.' the south upstairs floor reaching east from the reception and the upstairs floor overlooking the hotel's lawns reaching to the gorge below the falls. Further activity in other bedroom blocks and public areas will be under way in 2024. This is all aimed at meeting guest expectations of an historic hotel offering Edwardian-Georgian features from the first half of the 20th century, as well as expectations of the same guests of services, facilities and amenities equal to any in the world, - including those of the most modern, technologically-supported kind.

"The imprint of this refurbishment will lie over the hotel for several decades to come, so it is being undertaken with care and flair, so that we respect its past and still meet present-day expectations," he said.

The physical exterior of The Victoria Falls Hotel retains its Edwardian style. Inside, the new look resulting from the refurbishment brings together traditional and modern. Work has been taken to the most basic of levels, lifting floors and removing ceilings, replacing cabling, wiring and plumbing pipes, stripping surfaces to brick walls and ensuring the very foundations and structures above them are fit for purpose for another century of service.

Some bedrooms have been expanded in size, others have had new features such as privacy walls installed to separate beds from sitting areas, while others have seen the removal of baths and replacement by large shower stalls that are in demand by most travellers today. The result so far is a set of almost 50 refurbished bedrooms and suites, including classic bedrooms, premium bedrooms, classic suites and super-suites.

The hotel's flagship suite has been significantly redeveloped, and now hosts two bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, lounge and massive bathroom and shower room, as well as a private hallway. Its view is across the lawn to the spray rising above the falls, furthest in the hotel from the public areas. The Batoka Suite on the upstairs level above the lounge also features two bedrooms, a lounge and service areas, with a spectacular view into the Batoka Gorge below the falls. It is reached by way of the grand



double spiral staircase leading from the lounge. The royal suite overlooking the courtyard has also been expanded and modernized and will be especially popular with travellers bringing families.

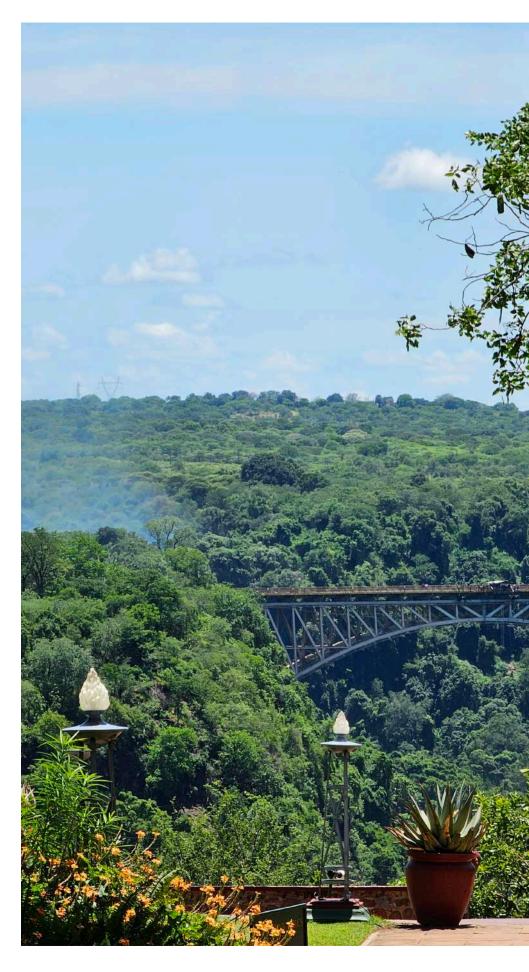
Design work features new fabrics, stylish new floor tiling, new carpeting and wallpaper pictures that feature Victoria Falls scenes and greenery. Lighting is discreet where needed and bright when wanted. Much thought has been given to modern features that serve good purpose, such as shallow basins for washing, large shower heads for maximum spray of water, and luggage storage in discreet spaces that do not take up areas that guests wish to make use of.

#### A home in Victoria Falls for the world's elite

Over its many years, The Victoria Falls Hotel has played host to some of the best-known names in the worlds of politics, business, show business, sport, arts and culture and many other fields.

One of the earliest celebrity visitors was George Darwin, astronomer and barrister, who was the son of renowned naturalist Charles Darwin, originator of the theory of evolution. George came to officially open the Victoria Falls Bridge in 1905. He was followed by a great many other well-known people, most of them having a break from their busy working lives.

One of the earliest royals was Princess Marie Louise, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, after whom missionary-explorer David Livingstone name the falls he first saw in 1855.



Princess Marie Louise came in the years before World War 1 and noted in her biography her delight with the hotel, and her surprise that such luxury could be found in the wilderness of southern Africa.

Perhaps the most famous royal visit was that of the British royal family in 1947, when King George VI was undertaking a tour of southern Africa to thank the people of the region for helping defeat the Axis Powers' threat in World War 2. Accompanied by Queen Elizabeth - later known for many years as the Queen Mother - and their daughters, Princesses Elizabeth (now Queen Elizabeth II) and Margaret, their two-month tour led them to Victoria Falls over Easter for a short break. staying at the hotel and enjoying Easter service in the chapel. Britain's Princess Royal, then known as Princess Anne, stayed in 1982, while her cousin, Viscount Linley - son of Princess Margaret - has his honeymoon at the hotel in

Scores of celebs have stayed before and after that visit, including movie stars like Peter Sellers in the 1970s and David Hasselhof in the 2010s and business moguls like Disney chief executive Michael Eisner, who brainstormed the future of the Disney empire while on a late-90s break. Along with them have been sports stars, heads of state and government and a whole range of other prominent people, all of whom have contributed to the hotel's rich history by being part of it.

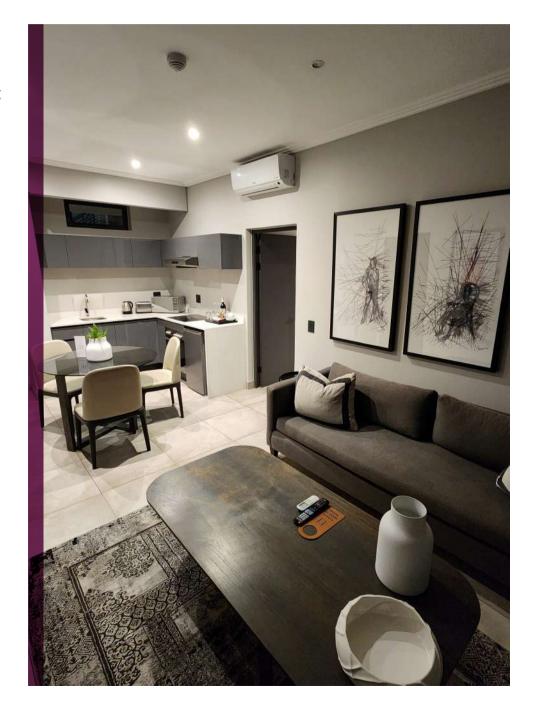
At The Victoria Falls Hotel, style and grace meet high-tech and convenience as it ends the second decade of its second century and its team looks ahead to greater things to come.



# Modern excellence meets comfort at Sandton's The Catalyst by Newmark

In the bustling heart of Sandton, Johannesburg, the contemporary Catalyst Hotel by Newmark has since opening, emerged as a beacon of modern luxury. This boutique apartment-style hotel is a testament to the evolving landscape of South African hospitality, seamlessly blending sophisticated design, culinary excellence, and a unique appeal to the bleisure traveller. I was elated to learn of this property, enjoying the opportunity for remote working as part of my cityscape circuit in the City of Gold, ahead of experiencing rich biodiversity at yet another property operated by Newmark Hotels and Resorts a mere 3 hours' away a few days later.

By Yvonne C Mtengwa



#### STAND OUT DESIGN ELEMENTS: WHERE MODERNITY MEETS COMFORT

The Catalyst Hotel's architecture is a striking fusion of sleek modernity and warm comfort. The exterior's clean lines, grey coloured façade and innovative use of materials make a bold statement against Sandton's skyline, while the interior design welcomes guests with a sense of understated elegance. It is almost unassuming in design; a set of mid-rise buildings that can be confused for a collection of apartments near Sandton's high octane business district.

But your arrival signals the entry into a space that speaks to the chic, bold and youthful, accentuated by the staff's vibrant, welcoming energy. Enter the lobby, a stylish introduction to The Catalyst's experience, which showcases a curated blend of contemporary local art and plush furnishings. The use of natural light and open spaces creates an inviting atmosphere, setting the tone for the hotel's commitment to providing a sophisticated yet comfortable retreat for its guests.

The guestrooms at Catalyst are not merely spaces to rest; they are urban sanctuaries designed for both productivity and relaxation. Each room boasts a minimalist aesthetic, with neutral tones and thoughtful lighting creating an ambiance of tranquillity. My one-space was no exception, becoming for a few days, my very own piece of well-defined, beautifully appointed workspace, featuring high-speed internet, and modern amenities including a kitchenette, spacious, superbly furnished living room with a dining area and balcony with views of the surrounding leafy suburbia, a modestly equipped gym for those who seek to maintain their doses of fitness focused activity during their stay. A generous king bed carrying fine, starched linen would be my place of rest by night, doubling as a



suitable sanctuary to contemplate the various elements of my visit to South Africa.

The hotel's commitment to sustainability is evident in its design elements. From energy-efficient lighting to eco-friendly materials, The Catalyst strives to minimize its environmental impact without compromising on the luxury expected by its discerning guests. This eco-conscious approach aligns with the contemporary traveller's growing appreciation for responsible and sustainable choices.

#### **CULINARY EXPERIENCE: A GASTRONOMIC JOURNEY IN SANDTON**

Catalyst Hotel elevates the culinary experience, positioning itself as a non-pretentious destination for gastronomic exploration. After a long day of work or discovering the city, sometimes all one wants is a hearty meal to settle down over dinner or a hearty breakfast to start of the next day. The on-site restaurant, a culinary gem within Sandton, reflects the vibrant diversity of South African cuisine while embracing international influences. The robust menu, curated by acclaimed local chefs, features a symphony of flavours that celebrate locally sourced ingredients. Guests can indulge in a fusion of traditional dishes with a modern twist, offering a culinary journey that mirrors the dynamic spirit of Johannesburg itself.

From artisanal, simple breakfasts to gourmet dinners, the restaurant at Catalyst appeared to be a hub where guests can sayour the essence of South African cuisine or entertain friends without leaving the comfort of the hotel. The oxtail with herbed mashed potatoes and the sharing meat platters turned out to be my culinary indulgence. After all, when travelling to Africa, sumptuous meat dishes are unashamedly a part of my daily dining experience, for love of standout texture and taste when compared to what's available in the Middle East.

To complement the gastronomic offerings, Catalyst features a stylish bar that becomes a focal point for socializing and unwinding. The carefully crafted cocktail menu, featuring both classic and innovative concoctions, invites guests to linger and connect in a chic and relaxed setting. The bar's design, with its contemporary aesthetic and comfortable seating, encourages both solo travellers and groups

to experience the vibrant social scene that Sandton has to offer.

#### **BLEISURE TRAVEL: AN IDEAL HAVEN** FOR THE MODERN TRAVELLER

Catalyst Hotel's boutique apartment-style concept caters precisely to the needs of the bleisure or even long-stay traveller - those who seamlessly blend business

and leisure in their journeys. In the heart of Sandton, the economic hub of South Africa, The Catalyst undoubtedly provides a sophisticated and convenient base for those visiting for both work and exploration.

The hotel's spacious and well-appointed apartments offer more than just a place to sleep. They become a home away



#### **EDITOR'S PICK • THE CATALYST**

from home, allowing guests to maintain their routines and productivity while enjoying the perks of a luxurious stay. The inclusion of fully equipped kitchens in some units further enhances the sense of independence and flexibility, appealing to those who prefer a personalized and homely experience.

Catalyst's strategic location in Sandton is not only convenient for business travellers attending meetings and conferences in the area but also provides easy access to the city's cultural and entertainment

offerings. The proximity to shopping precincts, cultural attractions, and vibrant nightlife ensures that the bleisure traveller can seamlessly transition from work to leisure without sacrificing precious time.

WHY MAKE THE CATALYST HOTEL BY NEWMARK YOUR HOME AWAY FROM YOURS WHILE IN JOHANNESBURG? Quite simple an answer here. This apartment-style hotel is a contemporary masterpiece in the heart of Sandton, Jo-

hannesburg, redefining the boutique hotel experience for the modern traveller. Its design elements, seamlessly blending modern aesthetics with comfort, create an ambiance that is both chic and inviting, offering an uncontested balance between business functionality and leisurely indulgence. As the hotel continues to set new standards in luxury and convenience, this relatively new property has fast emerged as the newest symbol of the evolving convenience-driven hospitality landscape in cosmopolitan South Africa.







## Ottoman-inspired Opulence at the iconic Jumeirah Zabeel Saray

A perfect staycation destination for families looking to enjoy the Persian Gulf's calming waters, soak up the sun under striking blue skies and immerse themselves in the flavours and textures of perfectly curated menus. An invitation to this iconic Dubai luxury hotel's premises took us to what felt like entering a portal to a luxurious Ottoman fairytale. The sprawling resort, reminiscent of a palatial estate, unfolds with breathtaking views of the Arabian Gulf, offering a symphony of opulence, impeccable service, and experiences that linger long after your stay.

By Yvonne C Mtengwa



#### ROOMS FIT FOR ROYALTY

When travelling with teenagers, and in my case, a boy, and a girl with completely opposing preferences, it is always a longwinded debate about the room selection they should anticipate and how much space will be awarded for them to comfortably settle in. Our journey began with a seamless check in, before being led to our rooms, theirs of which was a remarkably spacious twin room with a balcony overlooking Ain Dubai and neighbouring JBR districts. After grabbing quick bites from their overflowing tray of welcome sweets and fresh fruits, and taking their room tour, the teens were well nestled into their weekend abode, and I ready to see my room.

A Deluxe Sea View Room fit for royalty, and where every detail whispers grandeur, I was up for my weekend fill of rich textures, gold accents, and plush furnishings which evoked Ottoman charm, coupled with the cosy balcony unveiling the turquoise expanse of the sea, views of the Palm Jumeirah and the hive of activity from the glistening pool areas and beach club below. My bathroom, a haven, boasted a freestanding bathtub, inviting indulgence with a glass of bubbly for those with a need to slow things down with a little drama. Drapes, wood, and marble finishings, with the entertainment station seamlessly blending technology with the regal theme, from the mood-setting lighting to showcasing what to get up to at the resort, we were collectively guaranteed all the comforts of a perfectly indulgent weekend staycation at the Jumeirah Zabeel Saray.

#### **CASUAL DINING, BEACH** VIBES AND MORE

The resort's culinary scene was





a tapestry of diverse flavours, catering to every whim. For us though, we opted for breakfast and dinner servings from Imperium, quite striking with its imposing marble finishes, gilded pillars, high ceilings with dangling glittering chandeliers. Indoor dining areas as well as the outdoor grand patio overlooking the resort's sprawling, tree shaded lawns and beach a few steps away, set the tone for relaxed, casual dining in an opulent

setting.

We savoured the flavours that came from our delightful brunch experience at Zenzi Beach, a beachside boho-chic dining outlet that boasted freshly prepared servings of South American inspired cuisine, delightfully combined with live entertainment and views of the beach, to give a feet-in-the-sand sort of vibe.

Jumeirah Zabeel's private beach, with its pristine sand and gentle waves, was my

haven for relaxation. Winter months in Dubai are unlike no place else, awarding beachgoers the decompressing opportunity to sit under the blue skies, enjoy a cool ocean breeze with the sun to kiss vour skin. After brunch at Zenzi Beach. it only made sense to watch the sunset from the plush loungers before retreating to our rooms, where nearby attentive staff ensured every need was met, including that of keeping our mocktail glasses full. For the children, a dip in the infinity pool, seemingly blending with the horizon, offered them a cool afternoon hanging and chatting with mom, a much-needed break from the busyness of the week before.

#### A SPECIAL TREAT AT THE TALISE OTTOMAN SPA

Best described as a sanctuary for ultimate tranquillity, I had heard plenty about the Talise Ottoman Spa, a haven of serenity inspired by ancient Turkish bathing rituals. As one with a penchant for opportunities to luxuriate in spa settings, I took my first afternoon in to book the opulent hammam experience. My mind was blown, and senses awakened by the cleansing experience, characterised by traditional treatments and a sensory overload that transported me to a world of pure relaxation. A highly skilled therapist pampered me with a personalized massage, restoring me with a sense of balance and wellness that left me feeling revitalized.

#### A WONDEROUS ESCAPE FROM THE EVERYDAY REALITY

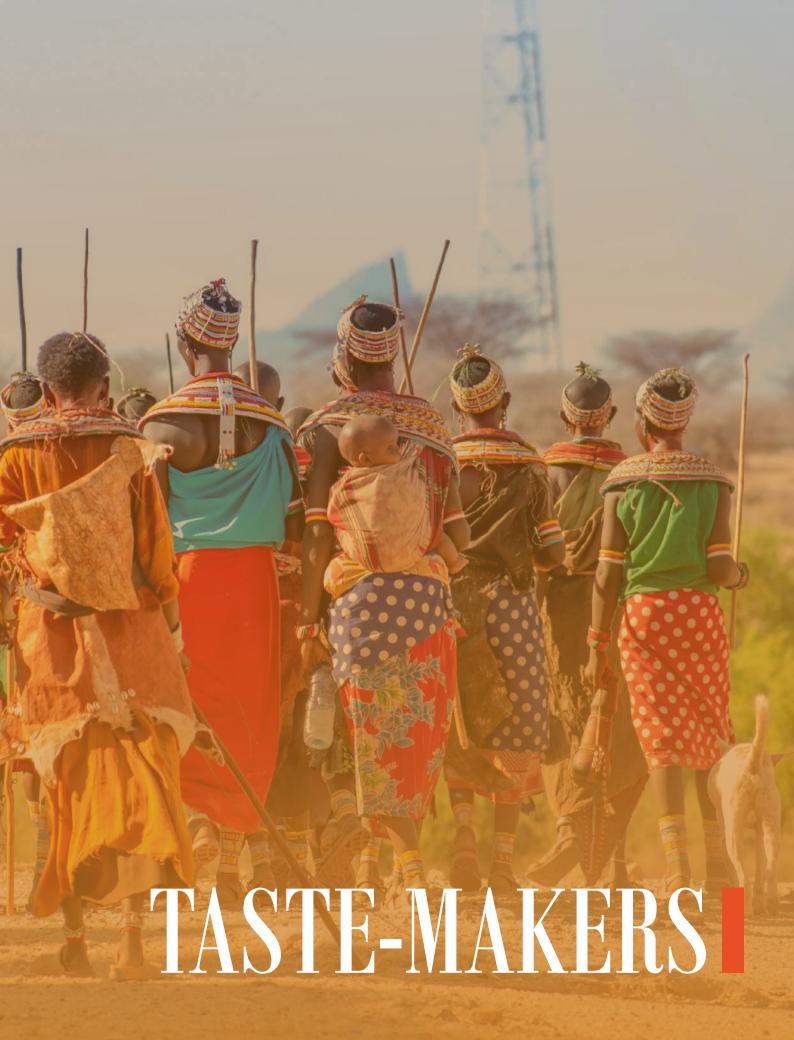
Jumeirah Zabeel Saray still holds court among Palm Jumeirah's luxurious resorts, and so a stay for my little family added to the many memories we carry as residents of one of the world's most compelling destinations. As with any high-end destination in Dubai, we left the resort with not just memories of opulent accommodation and impeccable service, but a sense of having experienced a true haven of luxury and cultural immersion embedded in the property's rich history, an ode to Turkish-inspired hospitality in this case, uniquely designed spaces to match. While our experience surpassed expectations by offering a haven where every detail was





meticulously crafted to create an unforgettable escape, I couldn't help but feel the need to look up more of the Jumeirah Hotels and Resorts portfolio to see which one about the city, could be our next destination for a Dubai staycation...

Yvonne C Mtengwa is the Founder/Editor-in-Chief of the award-winning Travel Essence Magazine, a communications strategist by profession, with an avid passion for discovering Africa's iconic landscapes through her travels. Connect with and follow her travel, tourism and lifestyle experiences on © @Quintessentially yvonne



# Beyond The Safam Stripes: Unveiling Africa's Soul through indigenous tourism

By Cynthia Mothelesi



orget the click-clack of camera lenses and the rumble of safari jeeps. The Africa I invite you to is not a picture, it's a heartbeat, one that drums in rhythm with your own beneath the vast, welcoming sky. Forget the fleeting thrill of wildlife chases; here, the thrill lies in shared meals that turn into family feasts, and stories whispered like secrets under starlit skies. This isn't Africa through a tourist lens; it's Africa woven into the tapestry of your soul by the nimble fingers of genuine human connection.

This is indigenous tourism, a symphony of joy played on the strings of cultural exchange, where your journey isn't about ticking boxes on a checklist, but about stepping into the living, breathing pulse of ancient traditions. Imagine trading city suits for the vibrant patterns of handwoven fabrics, your laughter echoing through sun-drenched villages painted with the colours of shared experiences. Picture yourself not as a spectator, but as a guest, welcomed with open arms into the rhythm of daily life, learning the secrets of generations whispered over crackling fires.

But indigenous tourism isn't just about escaping the ordinary; it's about rewriting the narrative. We, the people of Africa, are tired of the tired tropes – the poverty porn, the war documentaries, the endless despair. Africa is far richer than those dusty stereotypes can ever capture. It's the continent of joy, of sun-kissed smiles lighting up every corner, of peace that seeps into your bones like the golden sand beneath your bare feet. It's the land of a simple way of life, not one of deprivation, but one of richness in a way money can't buy – the richness of community, of belonging, of being a part of something bigger than yourself.

#### TASTE-MAKERS • HAPPY SOUL ADVENTURES



poverty. The river people of the Okavango, in their traditional attire dancing fearlessly as they celebrate a milestone in their lives is a testament to generations of wisdom in harmony with nature. The Bushmen adorned with intricate beadwork are not victims of tradition, but fierce guardians of their culture, their self-confidence radiating like the desert sun. And in the mud-hut villages, where laughter spills from open doors, you'll find not despair, but resilience, a community spirit that has weathered storms far fiercer than any tourist misconception.

Embrace the different. The pace of life might be slower, the rhythm gentler, the language a melody you'll learn with your heart more than your ears. Be prepared to leave your expectations behind, to replace them with a sense of wonder, of openness. Be ready to learn from the wisdom etched on wrinkled faces, the stories sung around crackling fires, the silent language of shared smiles. And be ready to contribute, not just financially, but with your respect, your curiosity, your genuine desire to connect.

Indigenous tourism is not just a vacation; it's an exchange, a dance of hearts across cultures. It's about leaving footprints of understanding, not carbon foot-

Indigenous tourism is the antidote to these misconceptions. It's a bridge built with laughter, with shared tears, with the rhythm of mortar pounding in clay as you help build a house. It's the chance to see beyond the headlines, to step past the safari stripes and into the beating heart of our communities. It's about understanding that every hand you shake, every meal you share, every story you listen to, weaves a thread of hope, of mutual respect, of a future where Africa is seen not as a continent to be pitied, but as a treasure trove of joy waiting to be shared.

But this journey, like any meaningful connection, requires preparation. Misconceptions, like weeds, can choke the roots of understanding. Before you embark on this adventure, let us clear the ground together. Remember, simplicity is not synonymous with



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#### TASTE-MAKERS • HAPPY SOUL ADVENTURES

prints of exploitation. It's about ensuring that every dollar you spend goes directly to the communities you visit, that your presence not only enriches your soul, but strengthens their future.

So, are you ready to ditch the safari stripes and step into the vibrant tapestry of Africa's soul? Are you ready to trade fleeting thrills for genuine connections, to rewrite the narrative with every shared meal, every whispered story, every drumbeat that resonates in your chest? This Africa is not a destination; it's an invitation. Come, weave a symphony of joy together, a melody of understanding that will echo long after you return home, a testament to the power of human connection that transcends borders, languages, and misconceptions. Africa awaits, not with open arms, but with open hearts, waiting to share its rhythm, its joy, its simple way of life with you.

What's your main driver when choosing a destination? It's nice to step into a totally different reality and immerse yourself into a new environment that is completely different from your daily life. The key things to consider when picking a destination are safety, the friendliness of the people and comfort. Most African countries if not all truly embody these key things. And you can book for a day experience and stay in a hotel if you want comfort or go full on and book for a village homestay and fully experience what it's like to live in an African village.

Indigenous Tourism is a sustainable tourism model that allows local communities to benefit directly from tourism and most importantly, it makes us feel closer and more alike. To be present, enjoy, and remember that there is so much beauty too, even if it sometimes can feel like we're surrounded by chaos. To create environments where both locals and visitors naturally connect and share. No matter where you're from or what language you speak. And indeed, Africa is way beyond the safari stripes and next time you book for travel to Africa, do add a cultural experience to your itinerary.

Let's take this first step and rewrite the story of Africa, one beating heart at a time.





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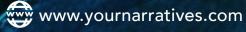
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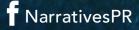
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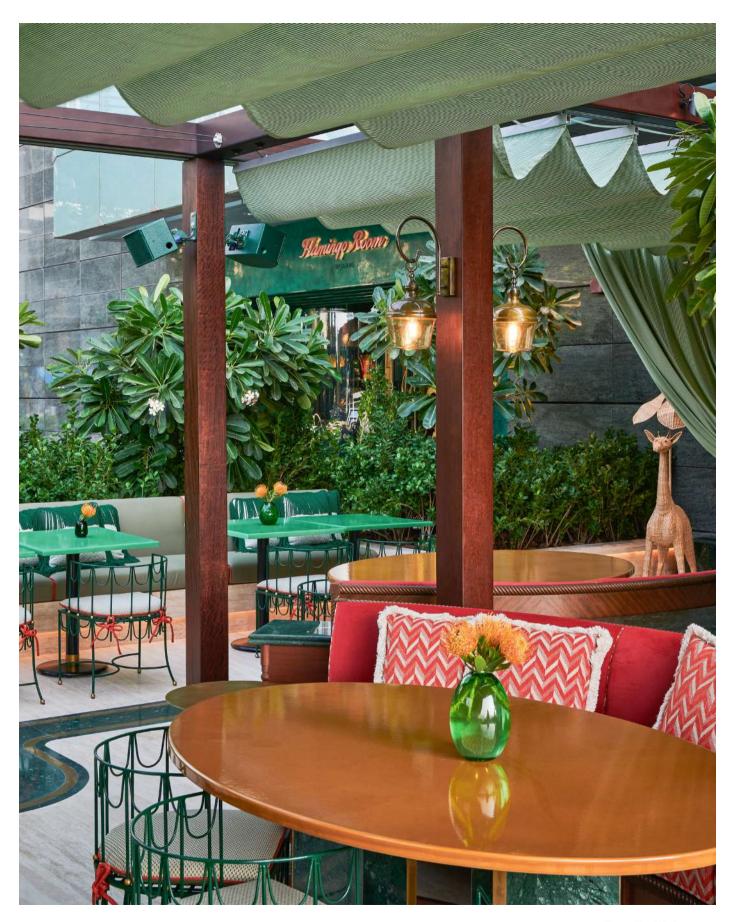
## African Lounge Abu Dhabi Where Safari-inspired Glamour meets the Arabian Sea

frican Lounge, a tented safari camp experience within the prestigious Flamingo Collection by Tashas Group, invites guests to embark on an expedition through the heart of Africa. Nestled within The Galleria at Al Maryah Island in Abu Dhabi, this exclusive lounge is a sanctuary that presents an immersive experience, offering an elegant and plush escape from the ordinary. It opened its

doors on Al Maryah Island in November 2023, marking another significant milestone for Tashas Group. African Lounge represents the untamed beauty of the African safari, and it is thoughtfully designed to evoke the relaxed style of a tented African safari camp.

"We wanted the lounge to transport visitors on a sensory journey that brings together Africa's diverse landscape and flavours from around the world. Bringing this safari-inspired glamour to Abu Dhabi is not just about introducing a new dining concept; it's about sharing a piece of my heart with the city," says Natasha Sideris, acclaimed Restauranteur, and the Founder and CEO of Tashas Group.

"From the emerald-green interiors and the splashes of gold to the flowing fabrics that adorn the area, every detail, from the interiors to the menu, reflects the profound spirit of the continent. With the





option of sitting indoors amidst a luxurious safari tent, or outdoors, surrounded by lush greenery and a unique sea view, we aimed to create an ambience that pays homage to the breathtaking beauty of Africa," she adds.

## BOLD TEXTURES AND FLAVOURS IN THE MIX

The allure of African Lounge lies in its exclusive offering, where guests can experience the enchanting blend of premium mocktails, exotic cocktails, savoury bites, shareable plates and an extensive collection of Mariage Frères, the iconic French tea brand. Each detail is thoughtfully crafted to captivate every heart, making African Lounge a destination that transcends the ordinary and stirs a spirit of adventure.

Bold flavours take centre stage through the venue's dining menu, featuring sharing plates like the toasty Grilled Bao with its showstopper Malay-spiced butter that is delicately moulded into cheeky animal pawprints in homage to Africa's iconic wilderness. Another highlight is the Calamari Sosaties, a zesty twist on a South African classic traditionally



made with meat skewers. Those looking for heartier options can try the masala-infused Prawn Arancini, served with fresh sambal salad, and placed on a bed of coriander salsa, or the Short Rib Sliders prepared with fall-apart braised short rib, a flavourful South African relish created with mixed peppers, called chakalaka, and a unique kimchi mayo.

A variety of indulgent desserts also await guests, such as The Sahara, with sweet apricot compote, cocoa nib short-bread, a caramel chantilly and topped with apricot sorbet, and the Nyiri, a deliciously baked passion fruit custard with macadamia praline and sugar dough, served with a tangy passion fruit cream and ice cream, beautifully constructed to appear like a traditional African mask.

Delight your senses with the tangy Tangerine Queen, a compelling mix of mandarin, passion fruit, kaffir lime, lemongrass, and carbonated ginger sharing a vibrant tale reminiscent of an African sunset. Experience the vibrant King of the Bongo, blending Kiwi, lime, pineapple, jasmine leaf tea, and whey and savour the invigorating Senzo Spot, featuring Kalamansi, lime, pineapple, Sichuan pepper, and infused with sweet agave nectar. These premium mocktails, to name but a few, are crafted with precision, offering a symphony of tastes that elevate the senses and pair perfectly with the exciting fare of African Lounge.

Furthermore, the awe-inspiring lounge offers guests a trademark selection of cocktails that add a touch of sophistication to the experience, promising an engaging journey that whets the taste buds. Highlights include beverages like To Crown it All, made with Absolut Elyx, passion fruit, mandarin, kaffir lime, lemongrass, and ginger soda and the enticing Madiba Fashion with Michter's Bourbon, demerara sugar, aromatic bitters, and beeswax.

African Lounge unfolds as an intimate haven where guests can unwind amidst carefully curated interiors adorned in emerald green and splashes of gold. Boasting an intimate interior engulfed in tented luxury, the venue beckons guests to indulge in a soulful escape. Additionally, an outdoor terrace, surrounded by lush greenery and featuring a flowing fabric canopy in a complementary verdant hue, provides scenic views of the canal. This harmonious blend of indoor and outdoor spaces invites guests to embrace the glamour of Africa in every moment, evoking a sense of soulful indulgence and an adventurous spirit.

**"WE ARE THRILLED TO BRING"** A CONCEPT INSPIRED BY THE BEAUTY OF AFRICA AND THE SAFARI TENTED CAMP EXPERIENCE TO ABU DHABI'S RESTAURANT SCENE. GROWING UP IN SOUTH AFRICA, I DEVELOPED AN **ENDURING LOVE AFFAIR WITH** THE STRONG FLAVOURS. WARM HOSPITALITY, AND BREATHTAKING LANDSCAPES OF THE CONTINENT. THIS DISTINCT DINING EXPERIENCE OFFERS SOMETHING TRULY SPECIAL, PROVIDING A FRESH AND EXCITING PERSPECTIVE FOR THE CAPITAL. IT'S OUR WAY OF INVITING GUESTS TO EXPERIENCE THE ESSENCE OF AFRICA, TO SAVOUR EXOTIC FLAVOURS, AND TO BE TRANSPORTED TO A PLACE THAT EFFORTLESSLY BLENDS INTERNATIONAL CUISINES,"

says Natasha. 🚳





## Let's demystify Conscious Travel in Africa: What's it all about?

In an era where travel has become not only a privilege but a global pastime, the concept of "conscious travel" has gained traction. But equally with every era, certain terms become buzzwords, fads or concepts that take on varied forms based on who will move fastest in adding their sentiment to the topic at hand. Post-pandemic travel quickly delighted avid explorers with the notion of conscious travel, known as mindful travel to some, and leading us to attempt to unpack what it all means...



ithout question, this is an emerging trend that encourages travellers to be aware of their impact on the environment, local cultures, and economies. A movement that transcends borders, but has found a special place in the diverse and enchanting landscapes of Africa, the idea of conscious travel has opened the adventurers to a continent brimming with natural beauty, rich heritage, and a growing commitment to sustainable tourism. Travel Essence Magazine journeys through 2023, challenged us to explore the essence of conscious travel and delve into the trending destinations in Africa where mindful exploration is taking root.

At its core, the essence of conscious travel is about recognizing that the act of traveling has consequences beyond our personal experiences. It is a call for travellers to consider in summary, the following aspects:

- The importance of sustainability: Conscious travellers aim to minimize their environmental impact. This includes reducing waste, conserving resources, and supporting eco-friendly accommodations and activities.
- Respect for Local Cultures: Mindful travellers respect local customs and traditions, seeking to engage with communities in a respectful and immersive manner rather than as mere spectators.
- **Economic Empowerment:** The conscious traveller con-





- tributes to the local economy by supporting small businesses, artisans, and locally-owned accommodations.
- Mindful Consumption: Conscious travel encourages travellers to be mindful consumers, promoting eco-friendly products and experiences.
- Personal Growth: A big one! Through conscious travel, individuals often find personal growth and enrichment. The focus on self-awareness and purposeful experiences can lead to transformative journeys.

## What about conscious travel in an African context?

Africa, with its vast and varied landscapes, diverse cultures, and a growing commitment to sustainable tourism, is an ideal canvas for conscious travel. The continent has increasingly embraced the principles of ecotourism, community-based tourism, and conservation. With a myriad of destinations to explore on the continent, here are a few picks of the trending destinations that have grown to exemplify conscious travel in Africa:

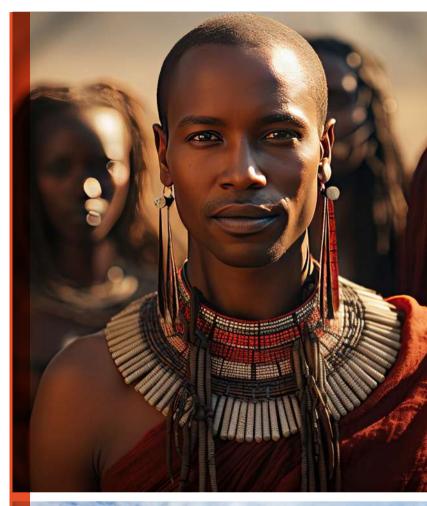
### 1. Namibia: Exploring the Desert

Namibia's arid landscapes are a prime example of conscious travel in action. The country's initiatives for wildlife conservation and community involvement have made it a hotbed for eco-tourism. Sossusvlei, with its surreal sand dunes and iconic Deadylei, attracts visitors in search of mindful encounters with the natural world. Sustainable desert camps and lodges offer eco-friendly accommodations while giving travelers the opportunity to connect with local communities and engage in conservation efforts.

### 2. Rwanda: A call to Gorilla Encounters

Rwanda is a shining example of conscious travel, primarily due to its commitment to gorilla conservation. The Volcanoes National Park is home to some of the world's last remaining mountain gorillas. Conscious travellers come here not only for the life-changing experience of observing these remarkable creatures in their natural habitat but also to support the conservation efforts that safeguard their future. Revenues from gorilla trekking are reinvested in conservation, benefiting local communities.

## 3. Madagascar: A unique biodiversity haven





Madagascar is a biodiversity hotspot, with countless endemic species and unique ecosystems. Conscious travellers are drawn to this island nation to explore its pristine rainforests, coral reefs, and limestone karsts. The country's increasing focus on sustainable tourism practices ensures that travellers can immerse themselves in this extraordinary environment while contributing to its preservation.

## 4. Seychelles: Paradise Preserved

Seychelles, known for its exquisite beaches and azure waters, is taking strides in sustainable tourism, awarding tourists the opportunity to explore this paradise while staying in eco-friendly resorts and participating in marine conservation activities. The Aldabra Atoll, a UNES-CO World Heritage Site, is a beacon of conservation, home to giant tortoises and vibrant coral reefs.

## 5. South Africa: Responsible Safari at its best

South Africa's conscious travel journey is marked by its wildlife safaris, particularly in private game reserves. Here, travellers witness the Big Five while staying in lodges that prioritize sustainability and community involvement. Game reserves like Sabi Sands and Phinda are celebrated for their efforts in conservation and community development.

## 6. Ethiopia: Unprecedented Cultural Immersion

Ethiopia offers a unique experience for conscious travelers seeking cultural immersion. Ancient traditions and historical sites like Lalibela's rock-hewn churches provide tourists with the opportunity to engage with local communities and learn about the rich cultural heritage of this diverse nation.

## And so why is conscious travel gaining popularity in Africa?

Several factors contribute to the rising popularity of conscious travel in Africa, including but not limited to:

- **1. Conservation Focus:** Many African countries are prioritizing conservation efforts, making it easier for visitors to discover ways in which to support these initiatives.
- **2. Unique Experiences:** Especially for Western and Asian tourists, it comes without debate that Africa offers unparalleled opportunities for mindful exploration, from gorilla trekking to desert safaris.
- **3. Community Involvement:** Conscious travellers can now directly engage with local communities, fostering cultural exchange and economic empowerment.

## 4. Sustainable Accommodations:

Eco-friendly lodges and camps are on the rise, ensuring that travellers can minimize their environmental impact.

**5. Transformative Experiences:** In an age where mental health and a focus on

self-care and healing journeys is on the rise, mindful travel has become a form of escapism that often leads to personal growth and transformative experiences, making it an attractive option for those seeking more than just a vacation.

It goes without saying that conscious travel in Africa is more than just a trend; it is a path toward a more sustainable and responsible future for the continent's tourism industry. As travellers increasingly seek experiences that align with their values and leave a positive impact on the world, Africa's diverse and enchanting destinations are well-positioned to offer journeys that are both extraordinary and mindful. Through conscious travel, we not only explore the beauty of the African continent but also contribute to its preservation and celebrate its rich heritage. This is the essence of traveling with purpose, and it's a journey well worth embarking upon.



# Munt's your cup of tea? A Deep Dive into the Continent's Thriving Tea Trade

From the sun-drenched Kenvan highlands to the verdant Rwandan slopes. Africa boasts a rich tapestry of tea-growing regions. Bevond the delicate aroma and invigorating taste you sip from your cup while seated in Africa or the diaspora. did you know that tea leaves grown in Africa represent a vital source of income and development for rural communities across the continent? Ever wondered which countries are leading the charge in the cultivation and exporting tea from Africa? Let's unpack where what's in your cup is coming from and the positive impact tea cultivation has on local lives in Africa.





## 1. Kenya: The Undisputed Champion

Kenya reigns supreme as Africa's, and the world's third-largest, tea exporter, with the country crediting this success to its ideal climate, fertile volcanic soil, and skilled workforce contribute to an annual production of over 400,000 tons. Kenya's tea industry is unique, with over 500,000 smallholder farmers contributing over 60% of the national output. The Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA) plays a crucial role by providing essential services like processing, marketing, and extension services to these smallholders, ensuring their fair share in the value chain.

This widespread participation translates into tangible benefits for rural communities. Tea farming generates income and employment, uplifting living standards through infrastructure development, with roads and schools built to support

the industry and benefiting the wider community. Tea growing also empowers women, who play a significant role in harvesting and processing.

## 2. Malawi: The Warm Heart of Africa's Rising Star

Malawi, nestled in southeast Africa, is a fast-growing tea producer and exporter. Its lush, mountainous terrain provides the perfect environment for cultivating the flavourful black teas for which the country has garnered acclaim. While smallholder farmers contribute significantly, large estates also play a vital role in Malawian tea production with reports citing that the industry employs over 70,000 people directly and indirectly, making it a crucial source of income and livelihood in rural areas.

Beyond economic benefits, tea cultivation fosters environmental sustainability. The Malawian government, in collaboration with the Tea Research Foundation, promotes sustainable farming practices to protect soil health and conserve water resources. This ensures the long-term viability of the industry and the well-being of communities dependent on it.

## 3. Rwanda: Where Quality Reigns Supreme

Rwanda, known for its verdant hills and gorilla sanctuaries, is also emerging as a force to be reckoned with in the African tea market. While its production volume is smaller compared to Kenya, Rwandan tea boasts exceptional quality, fetching premium prices in international markets. This focus on quality stems from the government's strategic investment in the industry, promoting smallholder participation and modern processing techniques.

Tea cultivation has also played a significant key role in Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction efforts, providing income and employment opportunities, particularly for women who make up a significant portion of the workforce. The industry also contributes to peacebuilding by fostering cooperation and economic integration between communities.

## 4. Tanzania: Diversity and Innovation at the helm of success

Tanzania boasts diverse tea-growing regions, each producing unique flavours and characteristics. From the strong,

malty teas of Usambara to the delicate, floral teas of Mufindi, Tanzanian tea offers a variety for discerning palates. The industry is dominated by large estates, but smallholder participation is gradually increasing.

Innovation is key for Tanzania's tea sector. The Tea Board of Tanzania and research institutions are actively exploring new technologies and varieties to enhance productivity and quality. This focus on innovation ensures the industry remains competitive in the global market, benefiting both producers and local communities.

## The Ripple Effect: Beyond Economics

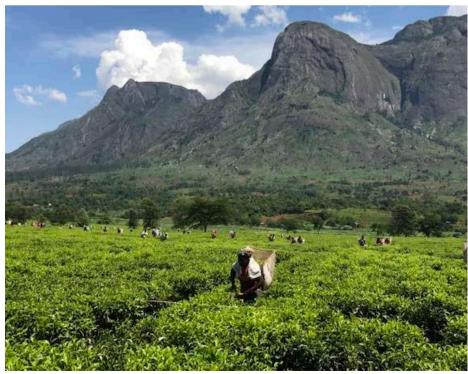
The story of Africa's tea industry goes beyond economic benefits. Tea cultivation empowers women, providing them with income and decision-making power. It fosters education, with some arguing that tea-growing communities often boast higher literacy rates than non-tea-growing areas. Additionally, tea farming contributes to environmental protection, encouraging sustainable land management practices.

## <u>lo</u>oking Forward: A Sus-Tainable Future

The future of Africa's tea industry appears bright. Growing global demand for high-quality produced and organically sourced teas presents exciting opportunities for African tea growers and the wider supply chain. However, challenges remain. Addressing climate change, ensuring fair trade practices, and investing in infrastructure and skills development are crucial for sustainable growth.

By embracing innovation, collaboration, and a commitment to ethical and sustainable practices, Africa's tea industry can continue to thrive, ensuring a brighter future for rural communities and a delicious cup of opportunity for the world.









## Inside the soon-to-open Bisate Reserve by Wildermess

Known as the Land of a Thousand Hills, Rwanda is home to astonishing biodiversity, all packed into one of the smallest countries in Africa. World-renowned for its population of mountain gorillas in Volcanoes National Park, and the extraordinary efforts to conserve them, the country also boasts a savannah safari experience in Akagera National Park, chimpanzees and other primate species in Nyungwe National Park, as well as in Gishwati-Mukura National Park. Added to that, travellers can expect a rich cultural experience in the bustling capital of Kigali, with a wide selection of accommodation options, restaurants showcasing local cuisine, vibrant markets and a flourishing fashion scene.

iderness is proud to be part of the thriving tourism industry in the country, which started with the opening of Wilderness Bisate in 2017. This lodge was the first really highend offering in the country for guests wanting to visit Volcanoes National Park. It has been an amazing success story, not only in commercial terms but because of the conservation benefits of the visionary reforestation programme, where 100,000 trees have been planted to date, restoring the natural habitat on the property and attracting a wide variety of wildlife, both big and small, back to the site. Species now resident at Bisate include tree hyrax, serval, side-striped jackal, Egyptian mongoose and



## tion tourism in December Through around brooking

ADVENTURES IN WILD AFRICA • BISATE RESERVE

tion tourism in Rwanda. Through ground-breaking reforestation and rehabilitation initiatives, each guest becomes a partner in biodiversity protection and local community upliftment, directly contributing to the preservation of the iconic endangered mountain gorilla species.

"The name of the new lodge was carefully chosen to celebrate the transformation of a former agricultural site into a thriving forest. Reserve also talks to the finest wine and whisky; the finest in luxury. Staying at Bisate Reserve will bring these two worlds together in a profound way for our guests, offering the most exclusive, intimate and impactful experience", says Rob Baas, Wilderness Rwanda Managing Director.

"Since Bisate first opened, it has been extremely rewarding to work closely with the Rwanda Development Board and our other partners to grow our positive impact in Rwanda. Bisate continues to receive local and international acclaim, and we are extremely proud to announce our expansion plans, allowing us to restore even more land, with breath-taking views from the exclusive new lodge directly into the park," added Rob.

The focus on conservation initiatives seamlessly blends with immersive guest activities, including expert-guided gorilla encounters (booked through the national park authorities), captivating nature trails and a vibrant birding environment. Moreover, the lodge's architecture and the opulent villas exude the regal traditions and heritage of Rwanda. These unique characteristics that identify the lodge extend beyond its walls, permeating into the community and offering guests the opportunity to engage with and support local empowerment initiatives.

This expansion of Wilderness in Rwanda will have an even greater positive impact on the surrounding community, with more employment and other upliftment opportunities being created or enhanced, with already more than 230 staff members employed across all the Wilderness products in this East African country. "This in itself makes the new property special in my mind, but over and above that, it will truly be an exceptional offering, with more privacy, exclusivity and an unbeatable location. Every aspect of guest comfort has been carefully thought out and planned, with very generous villas featuring private hot tubs, two fireplaces, in-room dining options as well as in-room massage treatments, to name a few," Rob elaborates.

Wilderness Bisate Reserve beckons as a harmonious union of luxury, conservation and cultural immersion, inviting guests to partake in a transformative experience while fostering a lasting legacy that resonates with the essence of preservation and sustainability. "We've kept the beautiful, iconic architecture of the original Bisate, which honours the culture and traditions of Rwanda, but we're taking it to another level and we can't wait to share this extraordinary offering with our guests," concluded Rob.

numerous bird and butterfly species, as well as a group of golden monkeys that is frequently seen.

The evolution of the Wilderness Bisate experience will reach unparalleled heights in September 2024 with the unveiling of its new lodge, Bisate Reserve. Intended to redefine luxury, conservation and exclusivity, this intimate new property will feature just four spacious villas, continuing Wilderness' legacy of driving conservation tourism in the region.

Positioned on the rim of a weathered volcano, Bisate Reserve offers captivating vistas overlooking six majestic volcanoes. Crafted with meticulous detail, the lodge is poised to captivate the hearts of every guest, marking a significant milestone in premium hospitality and iconic destinations.

In the same way as its sister lodge, Bisate Reserve embodies much more than luxury; it represents an extension and enhancement of conserva-

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## Guinea Conakry's shortlist

## What you can see when taking on this untapped West African nation

Guinea, a country celebrated for its rich cultural diversity and unspoiled natural beauty, last year invited me alongside other internationally based media, content creators and VIP government and private sector guests, to attend an event to mark the beginning of its annual tourism season. The town of Kindia, nestled in the lush greenery of western Guinea, was set to host an unforgettable opening ceremony, endorsing Guinea's ambitions to leverage its untapped potential in the tourism sector. This journey began with a 14-hour flight from Dubai to the capital Conakry, ushering me into six days of learning about Guinea through a combination of sightseeing, and connecting with the locals, who shed more light on the nation's top destinations for the off-the-beaten-track traveller...

By Yvonne C Mtengwa

uinea is an untapped showcase of an array of natural and cultural wonders, offering visitors a unique opportunity to explore one of Africa's unexplored gems. The Tourism Season Opening, dubbed La Saison Tourisque, is presented to locals and visiting guests as a gateway to discovering some of Guinea's most captivating destinations, which include:

1. Les Chutes de Ditinn: The breathtaking Ditinn Falls are considered by most as the most famous falls in a land where plummeting water is a common sight. They are found 3.1 miles from Ditinn village, in the center of the country and come crashing off a 120-meter cliff,

before cascading through dense rainforests. Visitors can trek through the pristine forests to reach these stunning waterfalls, taking in the lush flora and fauna along the way.

2. Fouta Djallon Highlands: One that the avid hiker will appreciate. Located in the heart of Guinea, the Fouta Djallon Highlands are a treasure trove of stunning landscapes, boasting rivers, waterfalls, and picturesque hiking trails that await adventure seekers in this region.

3. Îles de Loos: The Isles of Loos, a collection of serene islands in the Kaloum Peninsula, provide a tranquil escape for those looking to unwind on pristine beaches, partake in water sports, and explore the rich marine life just off the coast of Conakry. A short boat ride with the aid



of a local guide should get you out there and exploring should you want to enjoy a day out picnicking on an untouched set of islands.

## **4. Mount Nimba Strict Nature Reserve:** This UNESCO World Heritage Site, shared with neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, is a haven for biodiversity. Hiking through the lush rainforests reveals an array of unique flora and fauna and the pristine greenery for which Guinea is known.

5. Conakry: A must with every visit to a new country is exploring the vibrancy of its capital city. Conakry is in every sense a sensory overload, with a hive of activity on every street, corner, and city coastline. Vibrant markets are rife, colonial architecture invokes the spirit of bygone eras and a lively cultural scene sets the tone for an experience you'll long speak on. You won't miss the bustling streets; historic sites can be explored with a local guide and the Conakry Grand Mosque are must-see attractions.

## Working towards Enhanced Ease of Travel and Connectivity Guinea has been actively working to improve its travel infrastructure, making it more accessible to visitors from around the world. What stood out for me was how easy the e-visa application was, with the delivery of my visa within 24 hours from the point at which I made my online submission. Arrival was also a breeze, though I would recommend that one brushes up on their French. While our hosts from the Tourism Board spoke fluent English, few of the airport staff could assist English speakers when help was needed.

However, the key advancements to note include Guinea's investment in modernizing the Ahmed Sékou Touré International Airport,





also known as Gbessia International Airport, making it more convenient for international travellers. The Visa-on-Arrival service eases the entry process for tourists from various countries, simplifying travel arrangements.

While there is much to be done about the road networks within the cities, roads towards the countryside are continuously being developed, allowing for more accessible travel to remote areas and cultural attractions. Once we got out of the city (with a motorcade and military escort for our convoy of international guests and local dignitaries might I add!) the drive to Kindia was breathtaking, showcasing winding roads through steep, densely vegetated escarpments.

Where to stay in Guinea
Guinea's accommodation choices cater to a diverse range of travellers, though likely better serving guests looking for a more authentic, near rustic experience. We stayed at the Noom Hotel while in Conakry, a comfortable 4-star hotel on the coast which seemed to be an entertainment and special events haven for city dwellers.

I was to learn of the existence of several boutique hotels in Conakry (though I did not see them for myself) which provide personalized service and a touch of luxury, making them a favoured choice for business travellers and tourists. Kindia highlighted the availability of accommodations for those who wish to be closer to nature, as the country's eco-lodges offer a unique blend of sustainability and adventure. Staying at eco-lodges near national parks like Mount Nimba provides a true wilderness experience. Budget-conscious travellers can turn to guesthouses in Conakry and other cities, designed to offer comfortable and economical accommodation options.

## Tourism as an Economic Driver for Guinea?

I dare say that Guinea's tourism infrastructure remains underdeveloped when perhaps compared with West African neighbours such as Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria however, the objective of this in-





## ADVENTURES IN WILD AFRICA • GUINEA





vitation was to highlight the government of Guinea's recognition of the potential of tourism as a significant economic driver. There is still plenty to be done to complement the richness in natural assets that exist in the country. Tourism not only creates employment opportunities but also enhances infrastructure development and local economies, and Guinea is committed to protecting its natural and cultural heritage while encouraging responsible tourism practices.

The annual Tourism Season Opening in Kindia is a testament to Guinea's dedication to promoting tourism as a key sector for national development. The event showcases the country's hidden treasures and invites travellers to explore its untouched beauty, as Guinea's government continues to actively work with local communities, NGOs, and international partners to ensure sustainable and responsible tourism that benefits all stakeholders.

I came away with an appreciation of the effort it took to pull together resources for an event quite significant on the local calendar, which is a celebration of Guinea's remarkable journey in harnessing its tourism potential. While the event provided a glimpse into the country's top destinations, and a rallying call that Guinea is ready to welcome travellers from all corners of the globe to experience its vibrant culture, stunning landscapes, and diverse ecosystems, my biggest takeaway was that there ought to be a greater call encouraging the private sector to join hands with government to harness opportunities that will develop tourism infrastructure. In a nation exhibiting great potential, it remains to be seen the progress towards making Guiness a destination of greater interest to more international leisure travellers.



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# Luxor: Egypt's Whispers of Pharaohs and Sands

Luxor, a city cradled by the life-giving Nile, whispers tales of pharaohs, gods, and civilizations lost to time. It's a place where the sands hum with ancient secrets and the sun paints the sky with hues that inspired millennia of art. In North Africa, where dunes and vibrant cultures intertwine, Luxor stands alone, a crown jewel of human history and a destination that lures travellers with an almost mystical pull.

A Rich Tapestry of Eras

Unlike any other city in the region, Luxor's allure lies not just in its beauty, but in its layered past. Those who have walked on its streets will attest to Luxor being more than just a destination; it's a spark for the imagination. As you walk through its ancient sites, you become part of the story, a witness to a civilization that defied time. Let the hieroglyphics whisper their secrets, the monuments tell their tales, and the Nile carry you back to a world of pharaohs, gods, and enduring human spirit.

It's a living museum, where ancient Egyptian, Roman, Coptic, and Islamic influences seamlessly blend, creating a unique tapestry of eras. Walk through the colossal Karnak Temple Complex, where towering obelisks and hieroglyph-covered halls transport you to the reign of the pharaohs. Then, step into Luxor Temple, its majestic columns adorned with scenes of offerings and battles, whispering tales of Ramesses II's conquests.

Venture beyond the city and enter the Valley of the Kings, a necropolis where the grandeur of death rivals the vibrancy of life. Here, nestled amidst the golden sands, lie the tombs of pharaohs like Tutankhamun and Ramses III, their treasures and stories preserved for millennia. Each tomb is a testament to the Egyptians' belief in the afterlife, meticulously crafted with intricate murals and hidden chambers to ensure the pharaoh's

journey to eternity.

Not to miss on the west bank of Luxor, etched in the cliffs of Deir el-Bahri, is the breathtaking Temple of Hatshepsut, a female pharaoh who defied tradition to rule Egypt. This architectural marvel, carved into the rock and adorned with vibrant reliefs, is a testament to her power and reign. Ascend the ramparts, and let the Nile unfurl before you, a panorama unchanged for centuries.

## Egypt: More than Monuments

Egypt's mystique extends beyond its monuments such as the famed Great Pyramids and Sphinx of Giza a short drive from Cairo, the temples of Luxor and the life-giving River Nile that ebbs through it. When in the capital, immerse yourself in Cairo's bustling Khan el-Khalili bazaar, where the air vibrates with the calls of vendors and the intoxicating aroma of spices. Wander through the narrow alleyways, haggle for souvenirs, and lose yourself in the kaleidoscope of colors and textures. In the evenings, sip sweet karkadeh tea while watching the sunset paint the Nile with fiery hues, a moment etched in your memory forever.

For those seeking deeper experiences, a trip to Egypt also offers a glimpse into local life. As it should! Visit a traditional felucca boat workshop and learn the ancient art of boat building, a skill passed down through generations. Explore the vibrant sougs, where artisans create intricate metalwork.

carpets, and pottery, keeping alive the city's rich craft heritage. Share a meal with a local family, savor authentic Egyptian cuisine, and learn about their daily lives and traditions.

A Destination of Contrasts
From Cairo to Luxor and coastal

Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt boasts cities of many contrasts, where ancient wonders rub shoulders with modern life. The call to prayer mingles with the hum of tuk-tuks, and towering mosques stand alongside millennia-old temples, modern buildings and high-end hotels in some parts. Embrace the chaos and appreciate the contemporary scene, with the dust swirling in the desert wind and the cacophony of sounds, for it's all part of the unique charm of a city experience when in Egypt.





## Explore Egypt: A Call to the Adventurous Soul

Egypt stands apart in North Africa, offering a distinct blend of history, culture, and natural beauty. While other destinations boast stunning landscapes or vibrant cities, the likes of Cairo and Luxor provides an unparalleled immersion into the cradle of civilization. It's a place where the past breathes, where stories resonate through millennia, and where the human spirit shines through the sands of time.

For the adventurous soul, Egypt has long garnered acclaim as a beacon, calling you to explore its hidden corners, unravel its mysteries, and experience its magic firsthand. It's a place that will stay with you long after you leave, a reminder of the power of history, the beauty of diversity, and the enduring spirit of humanity. So, pack your bags, let the whispers of the pharaohs guide you, and discover the allure of Egypt, a nation boasting Cairo and Luxor, two of many cities that will leave an indelible mark on your soul.



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# While The Weather Is Still Delightful... Duban's Top Spots for Outdoor Adventures

ubai, often associated with its stunning skyscrapers and luxury lifestyle, is also a haven for outdoor adventurers seeking thrilling experiences amidst its unique desert and coastal landscapes. Beyond the glitz and glamour, this city offers a range of exciting activities that cater to the adventurer's spirit. There are a few more weeks of delightful weather, before the temperatures so again, keeping us posted on the indoors or waiting for the sun to set before we get out for air. With that, here's a quick list of activities you can still get up to for little adventure in Dubai, while the weather is still delightful...



7. Experience the heart of Arabia by taking on the desert. The quintessential tourism experience, but equally one that's great to gather family and friends in the outdoors. The Dubai desert is a vast, golden playground for thrill-seekers. A desert safari is a must-do adventure, offering dune bashing in powerful 4x4 vehicles, sandboarding, and a chance to ride camels. Adventurers can expect an adrenaline rush as they conquer the ever-shifting sand dunes, all while witnessing the mesmerizing desert sunset.

Play dress up in traditional Emirati dress while in a desert camp, get that instagrammable shot with a falcon perched on your forearm, or become mesmerised by the movements of belly dancers or the "Tanoura" - an Egyptian folk dance performed by a male dancer clad in a weighted dress adorned with lights, or settle down to enjoy the stillness of stargazing. The desert safari experience is an unmissable itinerary item when visiting Dubai, or if in need of experiencing time out in the outdoors for a few hours.

## 2. Skydiving over the Palm Jumeirah:

Dare to touch the sky and freefall over Dubai from above? For those who crave the ultimate adrenaline rush, skydiving over the iconic Palm Jumeirah Island is a breathtaking experience. This one is for the more brazen as adventurers take the courageous leap from a plane at 13,000 feet, feeling the wind rush past them as they descend with a bird's-eye view of the city's extraordinary skyline and the pristine coastline.

3. Ride the waves and the wind at Kite Beach: Located along the Jumeirah coastline, Kite Beach is a hub for water sports enthusiasts. Here, novices and water-loving adventurers can engage in kitesurfing and paddleboarding. The strong, consistent winds make it an ideal spot for kiteboarding, and beginners can also take lessons. Kite Beach offers a fusion of thrill and tranquility, with nearby eateries to wind down over a meal with friends and family.

4. Escape to nature's serenity with a hike up Hatta's Mountain Trails: Just a short drive from Dubai, the Hatta Mountain area offers a stark contrast to the city's urban landscape. Adventurers can explore the rugged trails on foot, offering panoramic views of mountains, lakes, and unique rock formations. The Hatta Dam is a prime spot for kayaking or paddle boating, adding to the adventure or forming a perfect backdrop for a little outdoor relaxation.

5. Pedal through the desert oasis with a bike ride to Al Qudra Lakes. This makes for a perfect excursion for the athletically inclined, as a full cycle can scale more than 30km and be quite arduous. But if it's something a little more leisurely you are after, Al Qudra Lakes is an unexpected gem in the desert, boasting a series of man-made lakes and a network of cycling tracks. Cyclists can traverse the picturesque desert landscape, spotting wildlife and taking in the serene beauty of the surroundings. A cycling trip here offers both adventure and a chance for reflection. Al Qudra Lakes is also perfect for picnicking away from the city's concrete jungle.

6. Ever heard of Sandboarding in the Big Red: If you're a snowboarder missing the slopes, head to any one of Dubai's desert big red dunes. Sandboarding is a thrilling adventure where you can glide down the steep dunes as you would on snow, experiencing the rush of sliding on a different kind of powder – sand. Al Badayer on the Hatta-Oman Road and heading out a little









## THE WANDERLUST WITHIN • DUBAI

further towards Sharjah's Fossil Rock areas will offer you great options to take on a sand dune of your choice.

## 7. Mountain Biking in Hajar Mountains:

Who doesn't want to conquer the UAE rugged terrain? Perhaps this is an easier feat for the adventurers that like to take on a challenge by tackling the Hajar Mountains, the absolute playground for mountain biking enthusiasts. Adventurers can expect daunting trails with steep climbs and descents, rugged terrain, and breathtaking views. It's an adrenaline-pumping experience that combines physical endurance with the beauty of nature.

Why not go deep-sea Fishing in the Arabian Gulf: Reel in the big catch, or simply enjoy a day out on the open sea with a deep-sea fishing adventure in the Arabian Gulf. Expect to hook prized catches like Kingfish and Barracuda as you venture into the deep waters, accompanied by experienced captains and top-notch equipment.

1. Go a little further for rock climbing in Ras Al Khaimah: Ascend the rugged cliffs of Ras Al Khaimah, a short drive from Dubai, which offers excellent rock-climbing opportunities. One can climb natural limestone crags, with varying levels of difficulty in this exhilarating test of physical and mental strength, all while surrounded by stunning natural beauty.

W. Live out your need for speed at Dubai Autodrome: For those who have a need for speed, the Dubai Autodrome is the place to be. Adventurers can try their hand at go-karting or opt for the high-speed thrill of driving a race car on a professional circuit, providing an experience that's both exhilarating and unforgettable.

Dubai's diverse landscape and commitment to adventure tourism ensure that outdoor enthusiasts have ample opportunities to seek adventure amidst this modern metropolis. Whether you're into sand, sea, sky, or mountains, Dubai's outdoor adventures offer a unique blend of thrill and awe-inspiring natural beauty. So why not carve out time to get out for some outdoor fun while the weather still permits! Top months for outdoor adventure fall anywhere from November to April, with some adventure parks only opening seasonally in line with the temperatures.





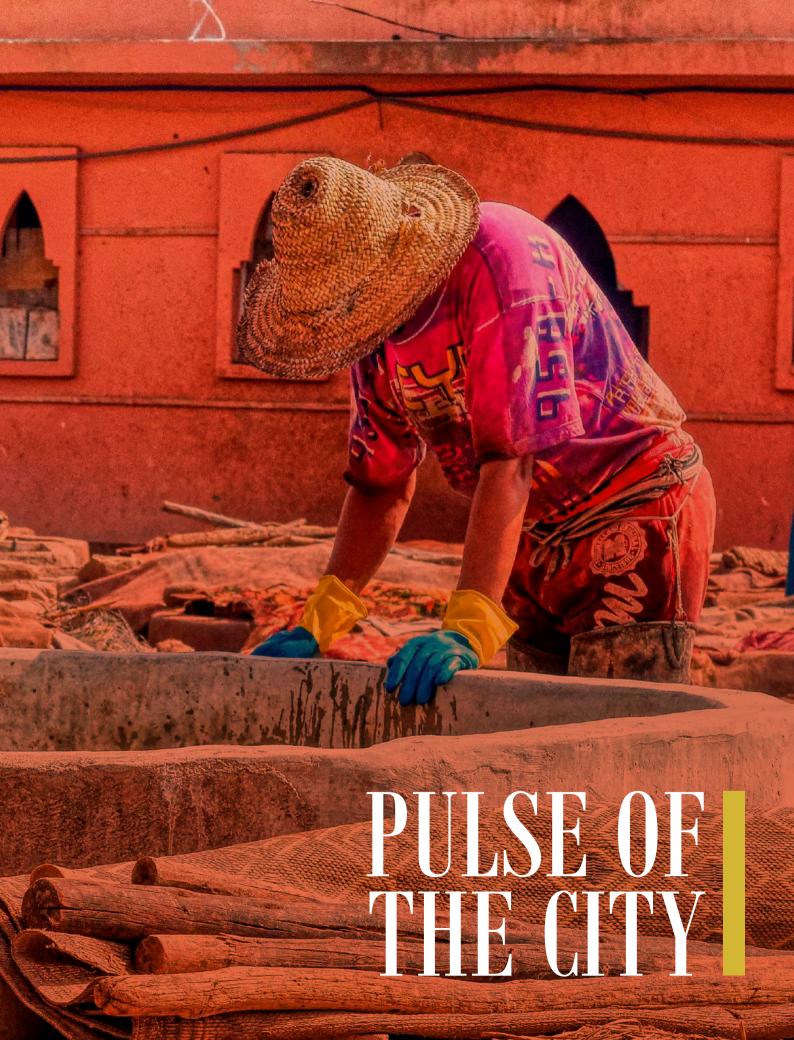




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## Monrocco's Tannenies: A tale of leather production and observance of ancient traditions

Moroccan leather has been long renowned worldwide for its quality and craftsmanship, with the North African country's leather tanneries forming a compelling story of observance of ancient traditions, and awarding citizens and visitors alike, a captivating glimpse into centuries-old techniques. The history of leather tanneries in Morocco avails a window into the intricate processes involved in tanning leather, and the diverse range of leather products that tourists can expect to discover.

ut within the explosion of scents and activity that these tanneries are known, one would be remiss to not acknowledge that the art of leather tanning in Morocco traces its roots back over a thousand years. The history of Moroccan leatherwork is closely connected to the Amazigh (Berber) tribes and the Arab influence on the region, the Amazigh people of whom are native to North Africa. They have practiced leather tanning for centuries as a means to create functional and decorative items, and with the contribution of the various facets of Arab expansion into the region in the 7th century, historians suggest that these traditional leatherworking techniques saw the infusion of new designs, dyes, and styles.

Today, Moroccan leather tanneries, especially those in cities like Fes, Marrakech, and Casablanca, have continued to employ age-old methods passed down through generations, highlighting how the leather tanning industry is deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of these cities, creating both a unique historical heritage and a thriving trade.

## So, what does the tanning process look like?

Make no mistake, the labour tanning process in is quite labour-intensive and requires a combination of artistry and skill, broadly divided into the following stages:

- **1. Soaking and Liming:** This stage begins with raw hides, usually from sheep, goats, or cows. These raw hides are first soaked in water to remove dirt and soften the leather, before being soaked in a lime solution, which helps to loosen the fur from the hide.
- **2. Fur Removal and fleshing:** After liming, tanners use a sharp knife to scrape away remnants of fur and any remaining flesh from the hide, with further cleaning to remove any excess fat or flesh.
- **3.** The dyeing stage: The hides are soaked in natural dyes made from various sources, such as pomegranate, saffron, or indigo. This critical step is what gives Moroccan leather its distinctive colours and patterns. The tanneries of Fez in particular, are famous for their use of pigeon droppings, which contain ammonia that helps set the dyes. And so, if you have ever been, you'll note the pungent sell at the tanneries. Well... there it is pigeon droppings, cow urine and lime play their role here.
- **4. Drying:** Once dyed, the hides are laid out to dry under the Moroccan sun. This natural drying process helps to set the colours and remove excess moisture.
- **5. Softening:** The leather is softened yet again by treading on it, often a task for apprentices who dance on the hides to make them pliable.
- **6. Crafting and Design:** The part consumers mostly look forward to turning the leather into goods we'll wear. After the leather is tanned and dyed, it is ready for the skilled artisans to transform it into various products. Moroccan craftsmen create a wide range of leather items, from shoes and bags to belts, jackets, and decorative items such as poufs and cushion covers.



## What type of goods are made from Moroccan leather?

Moroccan leather tanneries have over decades, garnered global acclaim for producing a diverse array of products, each with its unique design and cultural significance. Some of the most popular leather items that tourists can discover in Morocco include leather bags, which come in various styles. From timeless leather satchels to intricately designed handbags and backpacks, craftsmanship and quality make them sought-after items.

Moroccan leather shoes are renowned for their comfort and durability, boasting styles that range from traditional Babouche slippers to more modern designs. The tanneries in Fes and Marrakech are particularly well-known for their footwear, and exquisite leather belts which also showcase intricate designs and metal embellishments are a common find. Combined, these two items can add a touch of Moroccan elegance to any outfit. Leather jackets also made in Morocco are not just functional but also stylish, coming in various designs, from classic to contemporary.

The home décor industry also benefits tremendously from Moroccan leather, with decorative items handcrafted with colourful, patterned leather turning into are a fantastic addition to any home decor. Other examples include Moroccan poufs, also crafted using leather with stunning embroidery and serving as extra seating, footrests, or decorative elements in homes. It is also commonplace to see the use of colourful leather incorporated in the design of such furnishings as lampshades, mirrors, and wall hangings.

## Bolstering Morocco's tourism economij

Visiting a Moroccan leather tannery



is an experience that immerses tourists in both history and craftsmanship, such that some of the most renowned tanneries are open to the public and offer guided tours. Key tanneries for tourists to explore include Chouara Tannery in Fes, which is in fact is one of the oldest tanneries in the city, dating back over a thousand years. Tourists can witness the tanning process from a rooftop

viewing platform. While it is an assault on the senses with the pungent smell of ammonia from pigeon droppings, cow urine and vibrant dyes, it remains a captivating experience if you can work your way through the strong smell.

Sidi Moussa Tannery in Marrakech offers guided tours, allowing visitors to observe the tanning process and the creation of leather products, which

many cooperatives in Morocco have gone on to enhance the empowerment of local artisans, especially women. These cooperatives award tourists the opportunity to witness the production of high-quality leather products, provide insights into the traditional craft, its history and how leather tanning is an economic booster for artisans.

## An ode to Morocco's heritage and cultural preservation The art of leather tanning in Morocco

is a living testament to the rich cultural heritage and skilled craftsmanship of the country. Moroccan leather is renowned for its quality and diversity, making it a treasure trove for tourists seeking unique and authentic souvenirs. The tanneries, with their centuries-old techniques and commitment to preserving tradition, not only produce exquisite leather products but also offer visitors an immersive experience into the heart of Moroccan culture and history. A visit to a Moroccan leather tannery is not just a shopping excursion; it's a journey into a world of heritage, artistry, and skill that continues to thrive in the bustling markets of this enchanting North African nation.





# Family Day out: A Rundown of 5 Spots where Fun Meets the Sun in Dubai

Dubai, a city known for its opulence and modernity, also offers a wealth of family-friendly experiences that make it a compelling travel destination for every tourist profile. And of course, it goes without saying that among these, its stunning beaches stand out as the perfect spots for those for seeking sun, sea, and sand. So where in Dubai relaxation can adventure, a dip in the ocean and unforgettable memories collide? Here are our picks for which beaches to check out for a day out in the sun especially with your family...



7. Jumeirah Beach: Nestled along the picturesque Jumeirah coastline, Jumeirah Beach is one of Dubai's most famous, family-friendly beaches. With its pristine shores and warm, shallow waters, it carries appeal as an ideal spot for parents to relax while children play safely in the gentle waves. The beach also offers a range of water sports, beachfront cafes, and stunning views of the iconic Burj Al Arab.

2. **Kite Beach:** As the name suggests, Kite Beach is renowned for kite surfing, but it's also a great place for families on a hunt for chilled vibes, offering ample opportunities for sandcastle building, picnicking and more. In addition to a skate park and trampolines, it features several food trucks serving everything from ice cream to gourmet burgers.





3. La Mer Beach, soon to be 1 Beach: Though currently being redeveloped to soon unveil an enviable seaside lifestyle destination called 1 Beach, we'll hold onto the memories La Mer Beach painted for most who had the opportunity to enjoy its sun-drenched spaces in the bustling Jumeirah 1 area. From a blend of art, culture, and seaside fun, families can anticipate that the refreshed 1 Beach seaside promenade will offer an array of leisure and lifestyle-fuelled experiences, including water sports activities, dining and shopping opportunities.

4. Al Mamzar Beach Park: For a tranquil family retreat, Al Mamzar Beach Park is an oasis on the outskirts of Dubai. This expansive park features five beautiful beaches, lagoons, and barbecue areas where guests can enjoy picnics, swimming, and play areas while surrounded by lush greenery.

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5. Bluewaters Island Beach: Located near the iconic Ain Dubai (Dubai Eye), Bluewaters Island Beach epitomises a unique family day out, as visitors can explore the island's vibrant dining and entertainment options beyond frolicking on Dubai's coastline. Stroll along the waterfront promenade, enjoy street performances, and take in the stunning views of the Dubai skyline.

One couldn't possibly run out of things to get up to in one of the world's most vibrant cities for entertainment and discovery. But occasionally, downtime does come welcome, especially when the temperatures drop yet still keeping the skies bright and blue. With a growing list of family beaches dotted about the city, one is guaranteed a wide range of experiences, from relaxation to adventure and everything in between. Whether you're building sand-

castles with the kids at Jumeirah Beach, enjoying watersports at Kite Beach, or picnicking at Al Mamzar Beach Park, Dubai's family-friendly beaches provide the perfect backdrop for creating lasting memories coupled with much needed downtime. So, why note pack your beach essentials and head to these stunning shores for a fun-filled family getaway in the heart of this vibrant city.

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