

TRAVEL ESSENCE MAGAZINE

JANUARY | FEBRUARY 2023

*Dubai's
Top Spots*

FOR THE
ULTIMATE GIRLS'
NIGHT OUT

ELE | NA
ELEVATES SENSES
ON MALDIVES'
BOLIFUSHI
ISLAND

*Victoria Falls
unpacked:*

LUXURY LODGES,
TOP NOTCH
EXPERIENCES AND
THE TASTEMAKERS
BRINGING THEM TO
LIFE!

Inside
SINGITA
SWENI LODGE
IN KRUGER
NATIONAL PARK

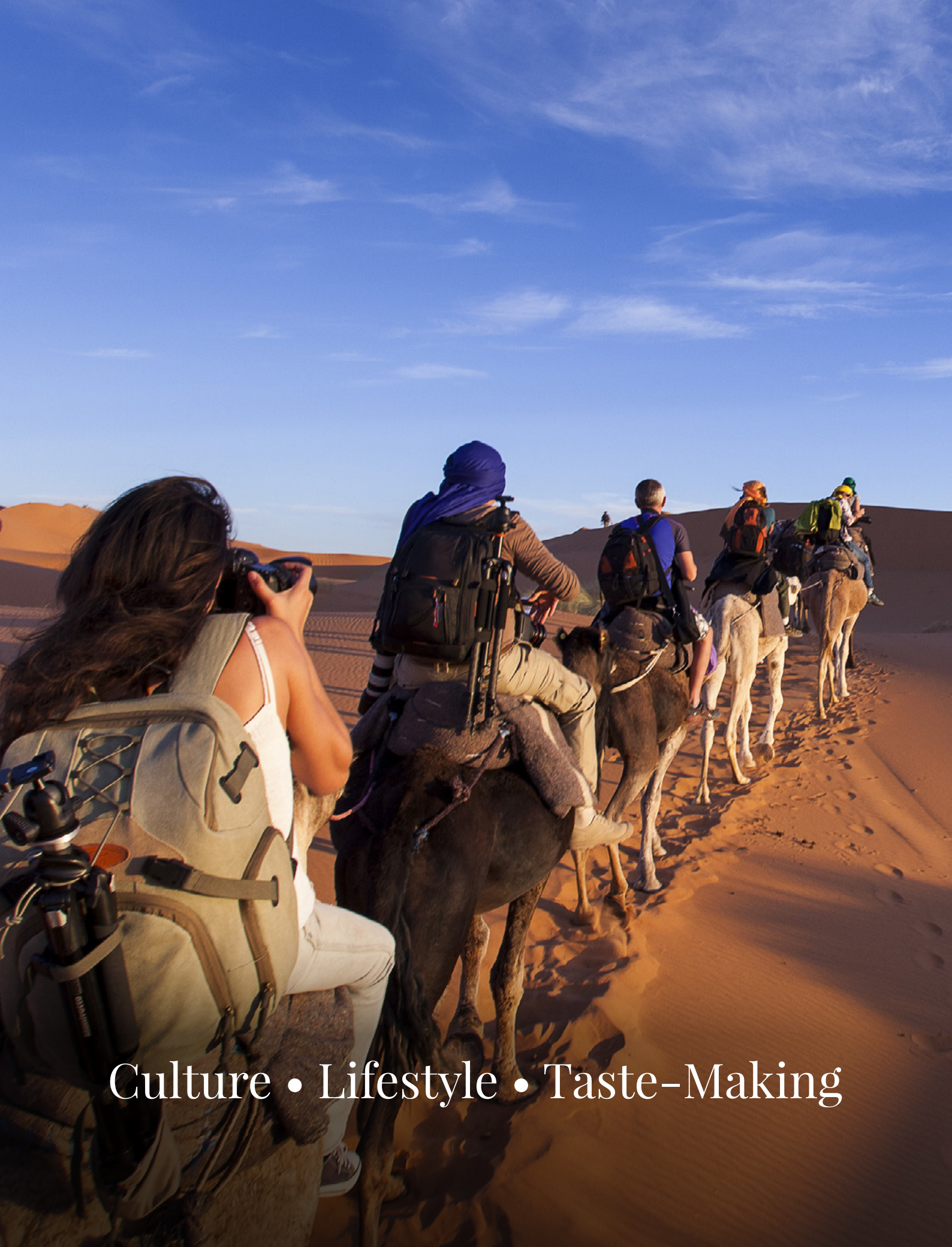
SARA GARDINER

LUXURY SAFARI RE-IMAGINED AND DELIVERING THE
WORLD CLASS MATETSI MAGIC



Travel MAGAZINE Essence

A NARRATIVES PR PUBLICATION



Culture • Lifestyle • Taste-Making

TravelEssence

MAGAZINE

Culture • Lifestyle • Taste-Making





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I think we can all agree that time waits for no man, and it is seemingly going faster with each week! After wrapping up last year's Africa-focused travel schedule in easily, one of my favourite places on the continent and the place where my career in destination marketing began in 2007 – Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe; I returned rejuvenated and with a renewed sense of possibility. We've all heard cool quotes and watched videos about how we should aspire to curate our lives, but always wondered what that would look like for the everyday person with a desire to experience a barrage of transformational experiences ever so often. For that season, seeing the thundering Victoria Falls from above onboard the Flight of Angels, from under it with a jet boat experience in the gorge, and from the edge of it by swimming in the Devil's Pool, my Victoria Falls bucket list was fully ticked! My only goal is to have more of my friends and family enjoy the wonder that is the great Mosi-oa-Tunya!

We are excited to be sharing as our Cover Story, the journey of Sara Gardiner and her family, who continue to deliver

fingers and have it, and so travel has become that industry that has become more and more innovative in tailored experiences that take tourists beyond movement between locations. Being on the pulse of travel, hospitality, leisure and lifestyle opportunities in the UAE and across Africa, has lent us the opportunity to see for ourselves, the very things that consumers are looking for, and we hope to be able to pull those together for your read and consideration.

I'm delighted to share our first Issue of Travel Essence Magazine for 2023, the 20th Issue since we launched at the onset of the global pandemic. Ours has been a journey of exciting discovery, and we couldn't have gotten this far without your support, and that of the incredible brands in hospitality, travel and lifestyle, that value our efforts. May this be that year you dare to go to the places you have never been, do the things you've been mustering the courage to pursue and most importantly, discover the best version of yourself yet along the way! 🌍

Yours truly,

Gywnne C. Mtengwa

“Once a year, go
someplace you've
never been before.”
— ANONYMOUS

award-winning experiences from the accolade receiving luxury lodge on the banks of the mighty Zambezi River – Matetsi Victoria Falls. My second stay at Matetsi during this trip, served not only as an opportunity to refresh and recalibrate as a lead up to the close of a hectic year, but to truly reward myself with rest in the throngs of nature. It was an opportunity I loved the first time, and loved even more the second time around so much that I was keen to understand how hers and her family's passion for creating what we now know as Matetsi Victoria Falls, came about.

Nature is therapeutic, restorative and healing, garnering humankind an opportunity to reconnect with self and the rolling tides of time in its rawest form. The beginning of the year heralds conversations around trends to watch out for across sectors, and so it comes as no surprise that appearing high on the trend list for travel are “transformation retreats”, sustainability or consciousness in travel, where the notion of giving back to communities or playing a role in preserving the environment is of importance to the traveller, and going at it solo!

We want what we want, and often wish we could snap our





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Sara Gardiner:

LUXURY SAFARI RE-IMAGINED AND DELIVERING

THE WORLD CLASS MATETSI MAGIC





1. SARA GARDINER. A FEW SENTENCES TO GIVE OUR READERS AN INSIGHT INTO WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT MAKES YOU TICK?

Born and raised in Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare, I'm passionate about showcasing my beautiful home country and creating opportunities for Zimbabweans here. I love this part of the world and it fills my heart with joy when others fall in love with it too.

2. WHAT ARE YOUR FONDEST MEMORIES OF GROWING UP IN ZIMBABWE AND THEN JOURNEYING THROUGH YOUR VICTORIA FALLS LOVE STORY?

From the age of three, my parents took my brother and me on adventures around Zimbabwe. I loved playing in the mud on the banks of the Zambezi river, going on game drives as a family in Mana Pools National Park and later learning to identify the birds around Lake Kariba. I moved to Victoria Falls in 2017, to join our Matetsi Victoria Falls team full time (the lodge opened in 2016), and I instantly felt at home, surrounded by wonderful people and incredible nature - amazing flora and fauna, spectacular landscapes,

and a mighty river that calms the soul.

3. THE TRAVEL ESSENCE FAMILY FELL IN LOVE WITH MATETSI VICTORIA FALLS DURING THEIR FIRST STAY IN 2021, SO MUCH THAT WE WERE BACK RECENTLY FOR OUR DOSE OF #MATETSIMAGIC ON THE BANKS OF THE MIGHTY ZAMBEZI. TALK TO US ABOUT HOW MATETSI VICTORIA FALLS CAME TO BE AND WHAT INSPIRES YOUR FAMILY FOCUSED ETHOS IN SERVICE EXCELLENCE, AS WELL AS CURATING A PERFECT STAY FOR YOUR GUESTS?

For many years, my family had a vision to create a centre for hospitality excellence in Zimbabwe, through which we could share the beauty of our home country; from the warm authentic Zimbabwean hospitality, to those spectacular landscapes, the rich wildlife, the mighty Zambezi river and one of the seven natural wonders of the world, Victoria Falls - known locally as Mosi-Oa-Tunya, meaning "The Smoke that Thunders".

That vision became a reality with the opening of Matetsi Victoria Falls, our family-owned and independently run luxury safari lodge, which sits on the

banks of the Zambezi River, within its own 136,000 acre wilderness, Matetsi Private Game Reserve.

We are so proud of our home country, and by creating a world-class destination here we are able to offer our guests exceptional experiences, during which they will create memories that will last a lifetime.

Through what we do we shine a light on the beauty of Zimbabwe, and our guests leave as part of our extended Matetsi family and as ambassadors for our home country.

4. IN YOUR WORDS, WHAT CAN A GUEST, WHETHER ZIMBABWEAN OR FROM DESTINATIONS FAR BEYOND ITS BORDERS, EXPECT FROM A STAY AT MATETSI VICTORIA FALLS? IN SHORT, "A STAY AT MATETSI VICTORIA FALLS IS...?"

A stay at Matetsi Victoria Falls gives guests the opportunity to immerse themselves in a pocket of paradise and gives them the freedom of time and space to enjoy whichever elements of our offering resonate with them. For some it's a safari adventure, for others it's river excursions, for many its access to the Victoria Falls, or it can be simply relaxing and enjoying our Zimbabwean hospitality, or perhaps all of these.

Always, a stay at Matetsi Victoria Falls allows our guests to experience what we fondly call the Matetsi Magic.

5. TAKE US THROUGH SOME OF YOUR MOST COMPELLING LESSONS AS A YOUNG WOMAN RUNNING A FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS IN LUXURY SAFARI-INSPIRED HOSPITALITY? HOW HAS THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNEY EVOLVED FOR YOU AND WHAT/WHO DO YOU CREDIT FOR OVERCOMING CHALLENGES WITH OPERATING IN ZIMBABWE?

Over the years I have learnt to watch and to listen. Through watching and listening I have learnt. Watching and listening to our Matetsi family, guests and travel industry colleagues.

I have learnt to genuinely use challenges as growth opportunities - we grow as individuals and as an organisation.





I've learnt that we really are stronger together. Matetsi Victoria Falls thrives because of the individual team members that are thriving within the organisation. When we create space for our team to thrive individually, then we shine as a whole.

Through the lessons we have learnt, we have chosen three words to guide us through 2023, these are Respect, Communication and Appreciation. We believe that these guiding words will ensure that we continue to shine.

6. MATETSI NUMBERS IN CONSERVATION SUCCESS ARE QUITE COMPELLING. 136,000 ACRES OF PROTECTED LAND, 9 MILES OF THE ZAMBEZI RIVER SAFEGUARDED, 16 SOLAR POWERED WATERING HOLES WITHIN THE CONCESSION, AND NUMEROUS ADDITIONAL INITIATIVES SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY AS WELL AS WILDLIFE AT MATETSI. TAKE US THROUGH WHAT POWERS YOUR COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY? WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO THE MATETSI HERITAGE MANTRA?

Not to mention 50 anti-poaching scouts and a K-9 unit... As a family, we are very grateful to call Zimbabwe home, and are very proud of our country. Through conservation and community work, we are able to contribute positively by protecting the natural and cultural heritage of this part of the world.

Everything that we preserve, nurture and create will be our legacy and as we protect wildlife and wild places for future generations, we hope to inspire others to do the same.

7. WHAT DO YOU FORSEE AS 2023 TRAVEL TRENDS, ESPECIALLY WITH THE EVOLUTION OF GUEST PREFERENCES IN A POST PANDEMIC ERA?

Slow travel – over the last few years, many of us have learnt to slow down, to “be” in a place and connect with that space and experience all that it has to offer. Travel is no longer just about ticking boxes, its about immersing oneself in a place and soaking it all in.

Philanthropic travel – for many who are in a position to travel, they want the experience to be about giving back to the destination that they visit. We have seen this more and more with our guests that are coming to Matetsi Victoria Falls – many want to learn about conservation through our Conservation Experiences and others want to connect with the communities that live in the Victoria Falls area and often guests will choose to make a philanthropic contribution to further positively impact the destination.

Family travel – travel really is a great opportunity for families to connect through shared experiences. It's also a way for parents to broaden their children's horizons. A trip is not simply entertainment, it's a way of educating children (and adults!) about different parts of the world. The term “edutainment” has been coined to highlight the importance of educating through experiences – whether that be on different ways of life, sustainability practices or the importance of conservation.

8. CURATING LUXURY TRAVEL EXPERIENCES AS A BUSINESS OWNER MUST CARRY WITH IT A GREAT DEAL OF INSPIRATION TO EXPLORE NEW DESTINATIONS NEAR AND FAR. WHICH 5 DESTINATIONS IN AFRICA, BUCKETLIST OR CONQUERED – ARE YOU ABSOLUTE FAVOURITES AND WHY?

Zimbabwe would of course be top of the list, though many would say I'm biased. Let me just shine a light of a specific area of my home country, the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe, which I have "conquered" again and again. Once a year I try to make a pilgrimage to this unique Afromontane forest region of our country, specifically Aberfoyle in Honde Valley - the ideal location to restore and recharge.

Namibia is top of my Southern Africa bucket list. The desert landscapes and unique wildlife fascinate me. I love a road-trip and I can't wait to traverse this land of endless horizons - it's also the only one of our neighbouring countries that I haven't visited.

Ethiopia is top of my Africa bucket list! This diverse country captured my imagination many years ago when I first tasted Ethiopian food and watched a coffee ritual, and I was further inspired to travel there when reading about the country in the Ethiopian Airlines magazine when flying through Addis Ababa - the history, culture, landscapes and wildlife... I can't wait to explore the land of origins!

Uganda - conquered, January 2023! This country hugely exceeded expectations. I was wanting to do Chimpanzee Trekking after Gorillas in Rwanda and reached out to The Uganda Safari Company. They lined up Gorilla Trekking in Bwindi, Chimps in Kibale, a visit to Murchison Falls National Park (which blew my mind), safaris in a vast savannah, cruising on the Nile River to see rare bird species and Murchison Falls - the most powerful waterfall in the world!) and wrapped up with an excursion to the source of the Nile.







Antarctica - conquered, January 2022! A continent in its own right, but accessible with a flight from Cape Town, so I thought to sneak it on the list. This vast white desert offers the adventure of a lifetime. A destination where luxury is defined by access, safety and comfort, with the opportunity to try to reach the South Pole and visit an Emperor Penguin colony.

9. WE LOVE THAT YOU EARNED YOUR PHD IN AN AREA THAT MANY WOULD VIEW TO BE SO FAR REMOVED FROM WHAT YOU NOW DO FOR A LIVING. SHARE WITH OUR READERS WHAT THE TERM “DO WHAT YOU LOVE” MEANS TO YOU?

Whenever I have the opportunity to interview someone, I always ask “What makes your eyes sparkle?” Creating opportunities for Zimbabweans and being in nature (and seeing people and nature thriving) are what make my eyes sparkle. I’m very grateful that the work I now do allows me to do these things on a daily basis.

Keep your heart and mind open and you will see the opportunities that life presents you. Leap at the ones that resonate with you.

10. FOR WOMEN LOOKING TO VENTURE INTO ENTREPRENEURSHIP, PARTICULARLY IN THE TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY, WHAT SHOULD THEY READY THEIR MINDS FOR?

Go in with a clear vision and hold true to your values. If you work with partners, ensure that you have complimentary capabilities.


Play to your strengths. Keep focused on your business. Know what others are doing, but don’t get distracted by it.

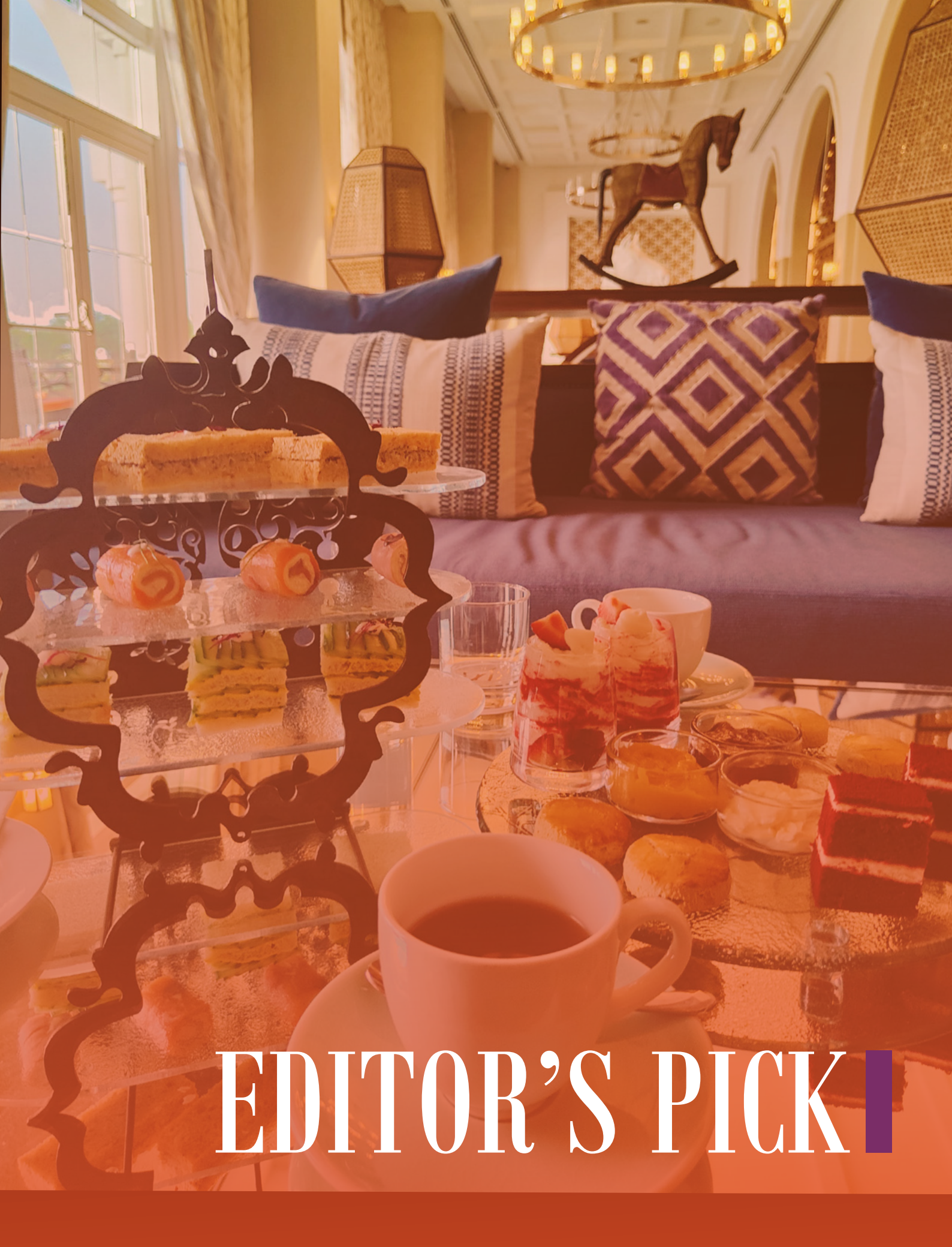
Seek out those people and organizations that inspire you and connect with them. Surround yourself with your tribe.

Know what differentiates you and tell your story with passion and authenticity.

The travel and hospitality industry is one of the most challenging, and also one of the most rewarding.

It’s an industry in which we get to make people’s dreams come true. Both for our guests, exploring and experiencing what our part of the world has to offer, and for our team members who wish to up-skill and grow – and we have so many examples within our Matetsi family already. Simon started as a general hand in the maintenance team and is now a Chef, and Nyasha started as an office administrator, and she is now an Assistant Camp Manager. This industry also gives us the opportunity to conserve cultural and natural heritage, which is so incredibly rewarding.

Ready your mind for the ups and downs, allow yourself to acknowledge the lows, but don’t let them overshadow the highs. Celebrate all the wins, even the small ones. Keep perspective. Remember to pause and acknowledge how far you’ve come and give appreciation to those that you’ve worked together with to get there. 



EDITOR'S PICK █

Eclectic food journeys in Dubai

Top spots for the ultimate Girl's Night Out

Resident dining and nightlife connoisseurs often always sing a song and break into dance each time they are asked what's hot on Dubai's culinary and entertainment scene. Let's be frank; in this desert mecca where "abundance" and "opulence" are the order of the hospitality and culinary world, filling rooms and tables is all about innovation in cooking technique, showmanship with food presentation, an ambience that sets the mood for patrons, mouth-watering servings and full on vibes. Because Dubai has a way of pushing you to discover new spaces while indulging in new tastes, we've together a list of spaces we absolutely adored for a good night out for after work drinks with the ladies, hang outs for couples, or just a vibe to savour sumptuous platters on any day of the week:

Basko/Suave

Beloved Basko officially launched its terrace for guests to now enjoy masterful Mediterranean cuisine under the stars at Basko, which comes with live music every evening. Patrons can expect this sophisticated and vibrant venue to provide only the best and most loved dishes in the Dubai culinary scene. Your food experience isn't the end of your evening at Basko though, as the night continues beyond the chandelier-inspired staircase, taking you to an old-school after-party, Suave – with the vibe you need to keep the energy levels high into the early hours. Welcome Dubai's winter weather at Basko with gorgeous Downtown views, chic retro interiors, and beautifully created dishes from this retro-Mediterranean paradise.

Avli by Tashas

Located in the heart of DIFC, Avli is reminiscent of modern Athenian culture and the open-air courtyards of the Mediterranean - where every meal is an occasion, each moment is a celebration and friends become family. Avli combines exquisite tastes, beautiful environments, and impeccable service and is tailored to be a unique reflection of culinary traditions.





pm to 3 am. The luxurious venue features a late-night DJ performance to add to the lively ambience. Located inside Roberto's, guests can step out into the restaurant to indulge in Italian dishes and bask in the gorgeous, uninterrupted views of the Burj Khalifa and its neighboring downtown skyscrapers.

Carna

Carna is a contemporary steak house concept helmed by the legendary Butcher, Dario Cecchini from the Chianti region of Tuscany, Italy. This vast atmospheric space seats host an impressive 252 guests and is located on

Bar Scala

Inspired by one of the world's most famous opera houses, Bar Scala is the perfect blend of innovation and nostalgia. Presenting an exclusive and luxurious cocktail experience, the newest DIFC bar operates from 8



EDITOR'S PICK • TOP SPOTS IN DUBAI

Level 74 of the SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences. The high ceilings and panoramic Downtown views are perfect for any big occasion that calls for a grandiose party for the masses.

Ergo

With neo-futuristic elements and retro-urbanity intertwined, Ergo is an ideal spot for drinks with the girls, with a daily Aperitivo offering from 6 to 9 pm. The venue, located on the Mezzanine Floor of The Edition Hotel, offers a 'Pretense' New Year's Eve party, where everything is not quite as it seems. Entertainment for



the night features mysterious elements reminiscent of Venetian masquerades, shadow dancers, grand decor, and secret rendezvous, all along with a disruptive playlist. The energetic vibe of the bar area spills out into the urban terrace space with views of the bustling Downtown District to end the night!

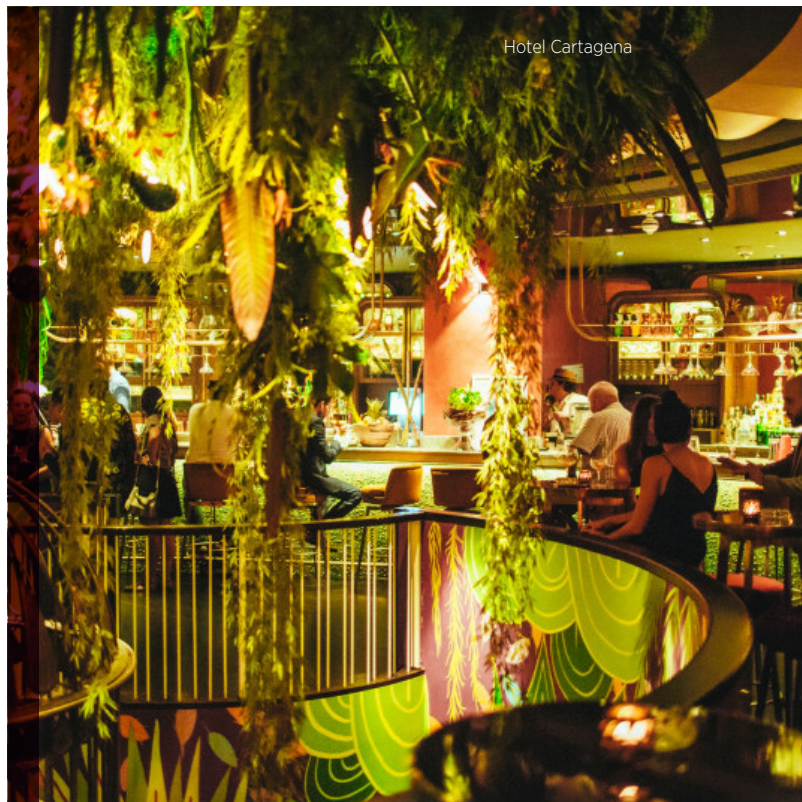
Garden of Dreams

The Garden of Dreams is a stunning al fresco space, set against a lush green landscape. Situated in the perfect location at Address Beach Resort, expect a night under the stars, overlooking JBR and Ain Dubai. An unforgettable night awaits, so prepare to dine on a set menu, with modern Mediterranean dishes and premium beverages.



Hotel Cartagena

Bask in breathtaking views of Burj Khalifa and its neighboring Downtown Dubai skyline—the best place to watch the sky light up with radiance from the 71st and 72nd floors of the JW Marriott Marquis. Mrs Buendia invites amigas to the vivacious bohemian hotspot where guests can dance the night away to Ritmo Latino tunes, and be dazzled by live performances from the venue's talented dancers!



Hutong

Born in Hong Kong in 2003, Hutong restaurant is acclaimed for its contemporary and occasionally fiery Northern Chinese cuisine. The venue, located in Gate Building 6 of Dubai's DIFC district, overlooks iconic landmarks such as Emirates Towers and the Museum of the Future, and just around the corner is DIFC's Gate Building. Hutong Dubai features a bespoke interior design inspired by 'The Four Arts' of the Qing Dynasty, paying homage to the ancient trade route, the Silk Road.




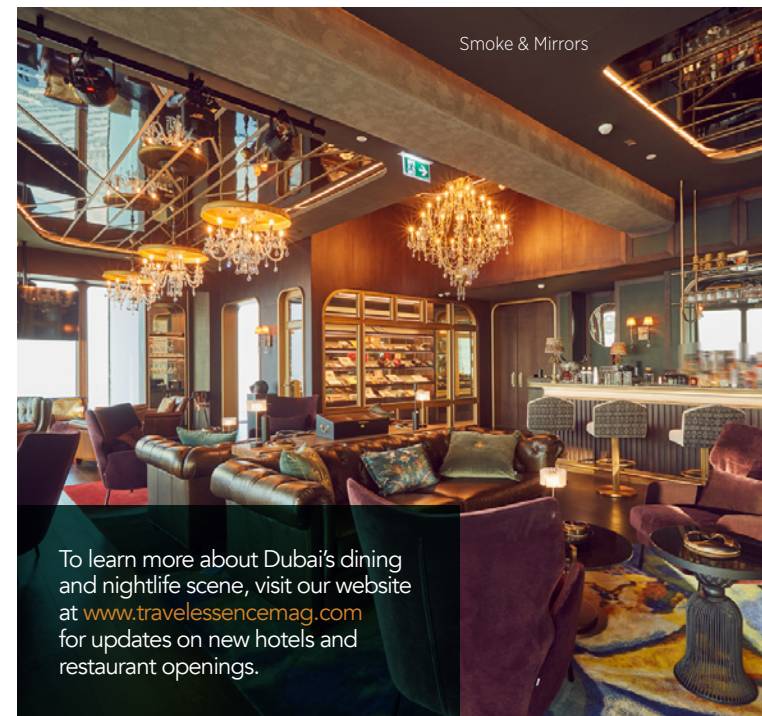
Nazca

The new concept is a merge of two cuisines, the unique flavours of Peruvian spices with Japanese ingredients, and both their techniques blended into a single style for an elevated gastronomical experience. Matching its menu's profile are the impressive interiors of the restaurant, embracing the artwork of Nazca culture from the southern coast of Peru. Large designs of linework the size of fields adorn the earth with geometric shapes and animalistic figures, which Nazca has embodied throughout the venue. Designed by one of Dubai's most iconic architectural offices ZN|The restaurant's entrance resonates the mysterious Nazca lines, and its floors, wall panels, and lights dazzle the venue with shapes and lines that surround diners in its environment. Accompanying the indoor venue is a terrace that surrounds the restaurant with an infinity pool and incredible views of the Burj Khalifa, its lights, and the city itself.



Smoke & Mirrors

Gather the girls and discover this hidden gem and cigar lounge at SLS. If you are up for a great night out with the ladies to roll in the weekend, or just celebrate your very own zest for life, with latin rhythms and South American flavours to satiate your appetite, Smokes and Mirrors on Level 74 of the distinctive SLS Hotel, with set things off quite nicely! 



To learn more about Dubai's dining and nightlife scene, visit our website at www.travelessencemag.com for updates on new hotels and restaurant openings.



Barefoot chic *sophistication* at WHITE Beach Club

Who were we to resist when the call came in for us to check out the newly revamped WHITE Beach Club on Dubai's Palm Jumeirah? Private pool settings under the comfort of a fully decked out cabana awaited us, and the gang and I came ready for a day in the sun over some scintillating conversations on all things life, entrepreneurship, goals and the rudimentary topics that make for an epic afternoon of girls' day out.

By Yvonne C Mtengwa

Having reopened its doors at the Atlantis, The Palm in the 4th quarter of 2022, the award-winning WHITE Beach Club provides a spectacular setting for day relaxation, which swings you ever so sleekly into the evening rhythm that the Palm Jumeirah is best known for. In a city where the competition is stiff for the most unique in dining, lifestyle and entertainment offering, here are 4 reasons why, whether you are a resident or visiting Dubai, you should make your way to WHITE Beach for a seaside day-cation to remember:

1. A new renovation that tips the scales of beachfront lavishness. If you were a frequent guest at WHITE Beach before its closure for the refurb exercise, you will notice a second pool, planted on the sandy white soft beaches in a unique diamond-esque shape, and expanding the amount of the popular front row sunbeds available for you to book and situate yourself during your day. A sizeable, more than 300m of poolside and ocean

views makes for stunning vistas of your surroundings, with the unmissable signature flamingo pink façade of the Atlantis, The Palm setting the scene of your backdrop, and perfectly Instagrammable shots!

An additional six luxury cabanas have also been added, featuring private plunge pools and a secluded lounging space, with two of these designed for large group bookings, which are able to accommodate up to 20 people in one cabana. We were to discover that there was an option to extend to neighbouring cabanas, making this a spectacular venue to host a special occasion in the sun with friends or family with a penchant for the soft life.

2. An eclectic menu offering re-imagined seasonal food and drinks.

You can expect a tantalising selection of mini bites in a mosaic of flavours cutting across your plates. Our entrée was a made-to-perfection sushi platter, loaded with a variety of Uramaki, Sashimi and Nigiri, an absolute delight to kick off what would also be an interesting culinary immersion throughout



the course of our day, courtesy of house chefs.

We also enjoyed a selection of Chef Ibrahim's Mediterranean-inspired menu, with fan favourites including arancini, crispy eggplant mille feuille, sautéed gambas tava, and grilled Spanish octopus, quenching our thirst under the summer sun with picks from a comprehensive cocktail menu, which included signatures such as Yellow Diamond, Zakuro and Costa del Razz.

3. Entertainment to take you from your daytime flex to night-time glam. Dance through the afternoon to the tune of only the best hits, projecting from the resident DJs deck, and take in the electric setting as A-list artists get ready to make their stop for only the best in live performances on the magnificent Palm Jumeirah

4. A stellar destination for a mid-week pool day. The reopening of WHITE Beach also brought with it the return of resident-favourite Daysies Ladies Day, which takes place every Tuesday. Now with the option to make advanced bookings for the day, Daysies Ladies Day offers the perfect mid-week indulgence, as ladies are invited to sink into their sun loungers and relax beachside or by the glittering azure blue infinity pools at Dubai's coolest and classiest Ladies Day.

Now with two Instagram-worthy pools to choose from, a reimagined seasonal food and cocktail menu, and a thrilling lineup of events announced from time to time, there are more reasons than ever to catch some rays at Dubai's hottest beach club. 🌴





To book your day-bed or cabana, visit <https://www.atlantis.com/dubai/entertainment/white-beach-club>





Andalusian inspired luxury at *Al Habtoor Polo Resort*

Nestled a short 30-minute drive from Downtown Dubai, lies the tranquil Andalusian inspired, 5 star luxury boutique urban resort, with grounds that almost for a time have you forget that you are in the heart of the Arabian desert. Expansive greenery to your left as you drive through the gates and onto the resort's Porte cochere, quickly whisk you into a themed setting, with imposing bronze prancing horse statues within a prolific water feature, welcoming you to an experience as unique as the hotel's design.

By Yvonne C Mtengwa

The invitation was to a wellness themed weekend staycation; enticing given the fast pace at which the beating heart of Dubai throbs. Check-in was earlier than the standard post 3.00pm time-frame, as the day would begin with yoga on the front lawns adjacent to the large terracotta terrace which typically hosts lavish brunches by day and live entertainment by night. Ready to partake of a carefully curated itinerary with “rest and relaxation” as the underlining theme, I was whisked to my Executive suite, which I would discover came complete with a well-apportioned balcony and views of the sprawling polo grounds below.

A taste of Andalusia in your accommodations

Al Habtoor Polo Resort boasts an array of beautifully appointed rooms, suites and 4 bedroom private pool villas for those requiring space that accommodates larger families in the most opulent of settings. State-of-the art meeting spaces with natural light, as well as wedding and event venues across the resort, make the property an ideal escape from the bustle of Dubai's metropolis.

For those staying in the rooms, Romeo & Juliet balconies overlook the Andalusian inspired courtyard, and come fully equipped with rainfall showers, bathtubs



and a double bathroom vanity. There is no doubt that your stay will be luxurious, as much as it is a reminder that your resort is themed for the equestrian, polo enthusiast or those with a penchant for the finer experiences that life avails. Stunning views across manicured polo lawns are on offer from the comfort of your private balcony, a lead-out from your Deluxe Polo View Room or in my case – the gorgeous and remarkably spacious Executive Suite.

My stay was an absolute treat, as I enjoyed a spectacular 67sqm suite which extended onto double width private balcony overlooking the Polo lawns. Upon entry through the polo hallway, the luxurious space led into a opulently decorated lounge and dining area, with the added convenience of a guest powder room. The space also featured an en-suite master bedroom, with walk-through closets to double vanity counters, a rainfall showers, and deep bathtub with luxury bathroom amenities.

A taste of Europe in food and aesthetic

The **Andalucía**, the resort's main all day dining restaurant was the perfect spot to start the day with a sumptuous, freshly made breakfast served from an array of cold and hot stations. The imposing high ceilings, with majestic staircases leading to upstairs corridors that lead to rooms and suites, give it a sense

of grandeur, yet patrons are very much welcome in smart casual dress to enjoy an array of Mediterranean and international cuisines. One easily imagines the Andalusia to form a perfect venue for celebrations such as weddings and birthday parties.

A famed favourite for residents within the nearby communities and guests at the hotel is the **Horse & Hound British Pub**, fashioned around a courtyard-inspired scene with prime seating on the lower & mezzanine floors. The outdoor terrace, especially during evenings and weekends, features screenings of sporting events, creating a more relaxed atmosphere with a satisfying menu of standard British pub favourites like fish and chips.

Dinner can take on a little bit more of an elegant flair at The Grill Pit, an Argentinian Asado-style grill that will indulge your deepest senses with its cuisine created from old-aged recipes, inspired on the slow grilling Argentinian flair and made to perfection. With an enviable wine selection to choose from, The Grill Pit is a perfect venue to wind up the day with a romantic dinner under the stars on the terracotta terrace facing more polo grounds, or an evening with friends over delectable steaks and seafood.

Guests can also enjoy a cup of coffee or lighter bites from the Equestrian Lounge, a refined lobby Lounge that exudes timeless elegance and pays tribute to traditions and heritage at Al Habtoor Polo Resort. Boasting unique décor and drapes, and floor to ceiling windows that capture the essence of daytime, one can easily walk out onto the outdoor courtyard seating, which provide unique blends and an opportunity to enjoy Nightly Champagne sabering.

A haven for the sporting enthusiast, polo-lover and equestrian alike

The Al Habtoor Polo Resort & Club offers exclusive polo facilities and four world-class polo fields to meet the expectations of local and international




To learn more about Al Habtoor Polo Resort, visit <https://www.habtoorpoloresort.com/>

players. The resort also houses a Polo Academy, designed to cater for all levels of players from those embarking on their first tournament, to those embracing the ultimate, high goal polo. The annual polo calendar ranges from league matches to high goal and challenge tournaments, with the Polo season running from October to May with matches a prevalent fixture on the resort's event calendar.

But there are more activities on offer at Al Habtoor Polo Resort beyond what the name denotes. Our stay was about exploring the available recreational offering that invokes a sense of relaxation. Guests can enjoy moments at the

Touch Wellness Centre for a holistic spa experience, burn a few calories in the fitness gym which offers a range of cardiovascular equipment or take a few laps at the sparkling swimming pool.

With fun activities for each member of the family, guests can in addition to more restorative experiences, enjoy a game of tennis, take on archery, padel tennis, yoga, kick boxing, and football tailored for children. The horse riding school and polo academy puts guests with a love for horses within reach of learning how to ride or participate in the intriguing culture of Andalusian inspired polo. 



TASTE-MAKERS |

Art of Africa: The Continent in Your Own Shade of Expression

By Kim Sparrow



Africa is a colourful continent, pieced together by thousands of years of stories and cultures. Its essence is held within the archeology of these tales – in the tradition and ritual of its people, and the wild unpredictable natural spaces. Africa is raw. It is to this rawness we connect, and find our creativity – with Africa as our muse.

Creativity offers us new routes into understanding our environment. Spending time in nature replenishes our respect for the earth and the interconnectedness of our wilderness. Capturing memories with brush and paint simultaneously captures appreciation of people, place and wildlife.

The Art of Africa Experience

Enriching one's time in Victoria Falls, Art of Africa provides artistic and poignant ways to engage with one's surroundings, using a sketchbook or canvas to catch moments and memories. Formed on the foundations of ethical tourism, the

homegrown company curates platforms which support both community and conservation, in a holistic fashion. Workshops take place in various outdoor locations in and around Victoria Falls town, using art to bring awareness and inspire action.

Starting out with 5 easels and one artist, Art of Africa has developed its own character, enabling guests from pairs of two, up to groups of sixty, to explore their artistic sides. Artists of all levels are invited to embark on a creative journey, simultaneously learning about Zimbabwe's nature and people.

The company works on three main principles: **Community, Conservation**

and Creativity. Through workshops, they encourage and empower by distributing skills within the surrounding community. Embracing the ideal of “Iron sharpens Iron” artists work together to better themselves and further their careers, as well as mentoring up and coming talent. Every session is led by a local Zimbabwean artist, who will guide guests step by step to creating their own masterpiece

Shared moments with local talent

Talented artists such as Tichoana Ncube, Khulekani Masuku and Clive Wakefield form the core of the Art of Africa team, alongside founder, Kim Sparrow. The

team poses a challenge to all participants; to step out of their comfort zone with brush in hand and venture outdoors – to natural elements and moving subjects. Workshops call for the willingness to be present and simply play with colour and shape – making art accessible to all.

Collaboration: An integral element to responsible tourism

From its conception, Art of Africa made a conscious decision to solely collaborate with partners that support responsible tourism.

Elephant Art Sessions:

The Art of Africa and Wild Horizons experience of painting with the elephants at the Elephant Sanctuary is a sensory exploration. The activity is holistic yet unobtrusive in nature, observing and learning from a respectable distance to the herd. Easels set up beneath the mopane trees, guests are led through the bush to begin their creative journey – often more trepidation about painting than being seated in front of a herd of African elephants!

Through active participation, guests are encouraged to familiarise themselves with art, as well as their immediate environment. This mindfulness allows them to connect to nature while reconnecting to themselves, using creativity as a channel to express, a skill many





of us have forgotten. There is something about nature which unlocks one's curiosity, allowing for experimentation beyond fear. Here, under the mopane trees and in the presence of elephants, one delves into their inner artist, welcoming the flow of our innate imagination.

Each final product yields completely different results, highlighting our unique perspectives and worldviews. Immersed in the bush, with natural elements forming the fabric of an outdoor studio, the session unfolds organically. The subjects of the workshop are not stationary, the wind perhaps rustling up orange dust, and warthogs scrambling onto the scene adds to the sensory journey – guests relinquishing to the ways of the wild.



Village Art Experience:

On the outskirts of Victoria Falls, lies Mpisi's Village, steeped in Ndebele culture. The traditional huts and communal living area reflect the ethnicity and lifestyle of the Zimbabwean people. Art of Africa and Bushtracks Africa have collaborated to create interactive workshops within the village which ignite and fulfil cultural curiosity.

Chief Mpisi guides visitors through the homestead, explaining how rural African life unfolds day to day. He then delivers guests to their easels and paints, set up within the main hut, boasting a panoramic view of the village. A private tutor, one of the chief's sons, is on site to guide the workshop. Catching memories through a fun acrylic finger painting workshop, a piece of Africa will be taken home of time spent immersed in local culture. This inclusive approach to village tours negates the voyeuristic aspect, allowing for a shared experience with the local residents.

Other workshop options include a ride on the Bamba Tram, stopping at Jafuta Siding for a paint and sip session in the bush. Immersed in nature and perhaps fueled by a gin and tonic, guests lose time and gain perspective during the hour-long workshop. A sunrise cruise with Pure Africa wakes the imagination and welcomes in the day with watercolours. The banks of the Zambezi River offer dramatic views of the National Park, contrasting colours between water and sky, paired with the anticipation of wildlife passing by. 🌍



Each art session is a personal endeavour, at the end of which one takes their memory home, in their own shade of expression. To learn more about Art of Africa, visit:
www.artofafrica.co.zw
artofafricazimbabwe@gmail.com
 © : art_of_africa





Avalon Van Leent

on levelling up Victoria Falls' Spa industry

1. AVALON VAN LEENT: TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR UPBRINGING AND THE FOND MEMORIES OF YOUR CHILDHOOD THAT INSPIRED YOU TO CALL VICTORIA FALLS HOME?

I was born in Harare and grew up in Masvingo where we had the most amazing childhood. We had mud fights, climbed mountains in search of ancient beads and swam in dams filled with lillies. We spent a few of our holidays as a family in Victoria Falls and every time we came up here, I knew I would one day call this home permanently. I love the sense of community and freedom the Victoria Falls sun brings.

2. WHAT INSPIRED YOUR JOURNEY TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP, PARTICULARLY IN THE SPA AND WELLNESS INDUSTRY?

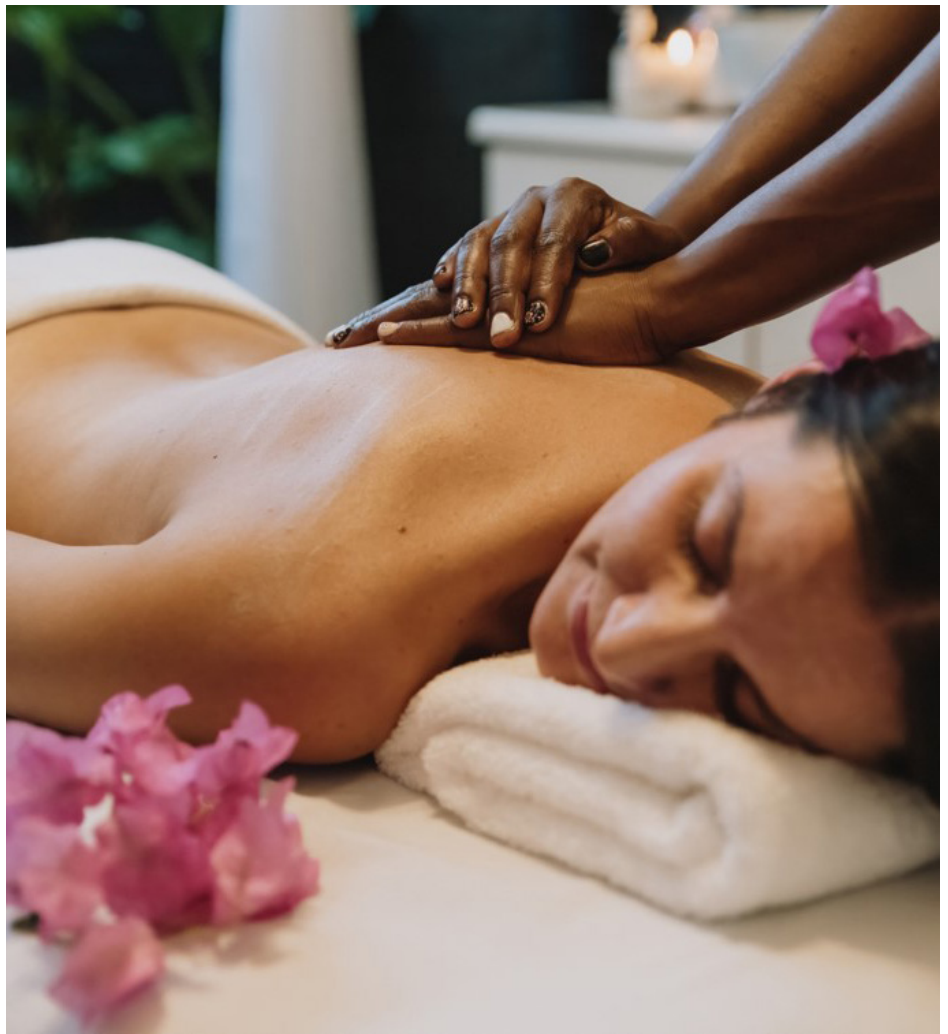
I have had amazing role models through my life especially in my family. I have an Aunt that is a force to be reckoned with when it comes to business. She owns and runs a very successful business, as well as my parents who have had a company in engineering since I was 8. Watching them build their businesses from the bottom up has always inspired me to build my own legacy. Spa and Wellness has always been who I am, from painting everyone's nails with little gift set polishes when I was little to trying to wax a



friend's legs at the age of 16 to experimenting on my very reluctant brother with homemade avocado and honey masks.

3. WE HAD THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE A WONDERFUL SPA-CATION AT THE BRAND NEW MVULA SPA, LOCATED AT SHONGWE OASIS, NOTING THAT IT IS THE FIRST FULL SERVICE BOUTIQUE SPA IN VICTORIA FALLS CITY. TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THIS BEAUTIFUL SPA OF WHICH YOU ARE THE OWNER AND HEAD AESTHETICIAN?

Mvula is the local name for the Zambezi Teak trees. We wanted to bring an extra avenue to Victoria Falls, with Shongwe Oasis being the first adult's only lodge. Our aim is to create a place of tranquility, a retreat. We have a range of luxury facials, using our very own skincare brand, AM Cosmetics as well as treatment baths, massages, scrubs, detoxifying wraps, manicures, pedicures, wedding





and event makeup. The spa therapists are qualified beauty technicians who have been hand picked for their skills, knowledge and commitment. We also offer personalised packages whether it is for honeymooners or a girls' day out.

4. WHAT MAKES THE MVULA SPA EXPERIENCE SO UNIQUE WHEN COMPARED WITH OTHER SPAS IN VICTORIA FALLS?

Exclusive use of the AM Cosmetics Professional skin range as well as being the first boutique spa.

5. YOU ALSO CREATED A COSMETIC RANGE DURING THE COVID-19; A BOLD MOVE GIVEN THE COMPLEXITIES THAT MOST BUSINESSES FACED DURING THIS TIME? TALK TO US ABOUT AM COSMETICS, THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THE BRAND AND WHERE WE CAN FIND IT?

It was a life long dream to start my own skincare range. COVID 19 brought the perfect opportunity to





start the research and development of AM Cosmetics. After a series of samples and testers we finally settled on what is now our core range. During this period I saw how much everybody's confidence took a big dive from being isolated.

This is where the 'AM' comes from. I wanted to remind everybody that you are beautiful, you are radiant, you are glowing, even if you don't feel it when you wake up. You've got our product lined up in front of you and it says to you... and you should say it to yourself in the mirror, "I am beautiful."

We are Zimbabwean-owned and our products are currently available at 3 locations, Mvula Spa in Victoria Falls which is the home of AM, Orange Elephant in Bulawayo and Calisa&Co in Harare.

6. CAN YOU TAKE US THROUGH YOUR CHOICE OF INGREDIENTS IN DEVELOPING THESE PRODUCTS, AND WHAT THEY ARE DESIGNED TO DO FOR THE BENEFIT OF YOUR CLIENTS' WELLBEING?

All of our products are made with up to 98.7% active, ingredients. The AM Skincare range uses only plant-based ingredients, producing high-end active products. AM Cosmetics is filled with vitamins, antioxidants, peptides, and botanical extracts to care for and rejuvenate your skin. No harsh chemicals, parabens, or formaldehydes.



It is very important that AM Cosmetics is cruelty free and vegan friendly.

SOME EXAMPLES OF THESE INGREDIENTS ARE:

- Aloe Ferox Extract which decreases the appearance of lines and wrinkles, maximizes the hydration levels of your skin while locking moisture in and soothes irritations by reducing inflammation and redness.
- Acacia Senegal Gum provides an instantaneous lifting effect, improves the texture of skin by smoothing over wrinkles. It also leaves the skin soft and supple and supports natural fibres such as collagen and elastin
- Hydrolyzed Soy Protein is an anti-aging active ingredient, among other things. It has a positive influence on the moisture balance of the skin, fills in unevenness and wrinkles from the inside and thus ensures a smooth and firm skin appearance



7. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE TRENDS IN THE SPA INDUSTRY? WHAT SORT OF EXPERIENCES SHOULD SPA OWNERS BE LOOKING TO CURATE FOR THEIR CLIENTS?

A booming wellness trend post pandemic is not just about physical well-being but also mental health. At Mvula, we believe in working together with other small businesses which complement each other to bring harmony to both body and mind. This can take the form of a holistic spa treatment followed by a serene bush painting experience amongst nature for example.





8. WHEN NOT IMMERSING CLIENTS IN A WORLD OF RELAXATION, WHAT DOES AVALON ENJOY GETTING UP TO FOR FUN?

Travelling!! I love experiencing new cultures and great foods. I also enjoy painting when I get the chance as well as spending time with friends and family.

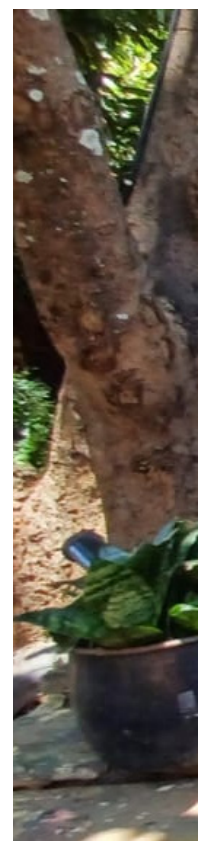
9. SPA DESTINATIONS ACROSS AFRICA AND THE WORLD YOU WOULD ONE DAY LIKE TO VISIT?

Dubai, Turkey, Phoenix and Iceland. 



Sarah Lilford on curating the Dusty Road Township Experience

In their most recent trip to Victoria Falls and surrounding areas, the Travel Essence team enjoyed a heart-warming opportunity to meet with the resort town's small business community, connecting with them over the evolution of Zimbabwe's most prolific tourist town in a post-COVID era. With brilliantly blue skies and lush greenery as the backdrop, they were whisked away by Clive Wakefield, who had been so gracious to host Travel Essence on a "Paint & Sip" experience the day before, to what he had earlier described as an exceptional dining experience with people at the heart of its operations.



It was upon arrival that the team met Sarah Lilford, Owner of the Dusty Road Township Experience, who would treat them to a delightful, authentically Zimbabwean dining experience. The conversation went a little something like this...

1. Sarah Lilford: tell us a little about yourself, your journey growing up and to whom you credit your milestones?

I grew up on a commercial farm in a place called Guruve, Zimbabwe, which was very much where my love of local produce, rural living, cooking and people became my passion. I went to school at Umvukwes School, Bishopslea and then onto Arundel. I was strongly guided toward having a practical future, not an academic one! Getting fired from my first secretarial job made me think I'd better find another skill! So, I went to England and completed a cookery course. I travelled the world using my newly-acquired cooking skills.

Returning home, I set up and ran my own catering company, where we specialised in one-off customised menus and over the years

catering for wide variety of private gatherings and corporate events. Seeking change and looking to expand my brand, I later moved to the more internationally renowned tourist spot, Victoria Falls. This is where I set up Dusty Road Township Experience in 2019.

Naturally, we had to close during the pandemic. We eventually re-opened in March 2022 and are now are at a very exciting stage, having survived the impact of COVID19 on the travel and tourism industry, which inadvertently feeds into our business. I feel strongly that 2023 is going to be a busy year re-connecting with everyone and working flat out!

As for milestones; this question often challenges me to pause and reflect quite a bit. Having come out of the pandemic, and reflecting on all we have been through over the years, I believe I do need to take ownership in crediting my milestones. It's been relentless, hard work and I rarely acknowledge my various achievements, and the resilience to survive and determination to never give up. So today I will! Thank you! I will also add that I acknowledge having had the most wonderful grounding, some helpful and sound advice within all as-





pects of the business, creative assistance from time to time, and generous lenders and donors as well as so many friendly supporters along this dusty road.

2. As the curator of the authentic Dusty Road Township Experience, a Zimbabwean dining experience, take our readers through what makes what you have created so compelling?

The Dusty Road style is cheerful, earthy, soulful and funky with a true purpose at its core. The welfare of women and children, female empowerment and the awareness of Zimbabwean food and culture is of huge importance to us. We are in the heart of Chinotimba, the oldest community in Vic Falls. Most of our visitors stay in the plush hotels and lodges where the majority of those who live here, work – the wheels of our Tourism Industry. We are able to offer our guests the contrast in life which is so important for balance and perspective.

Our aim is to improve the livelihoods of the families in this town through exposure to our visitors and the transcendental gift of human interaction, pausing over a delicious meal to properly savour the experi-

ence. Our ingredients come from small-scale farmers, the local market, the Zambezi River and the abundant bush. We cook over an open fire, giving it a unique smoky flavour. We work with nutrient-dense indigenous foods. Some you'll never have tasted before, such as baobab powder, mopane worms, munyii berries, zumbani, and mon-gongo nuts. However you can also savour more conservative dishes. Our style of food is simple and hearty and we pride ourselves on not being a fine dining restaurant!

3. How did your penchant for cooking, and now curating the Dusty Road experience for visitors to Victoria Falls begin? What influences has your international exposure contributed to food service at Dusty Road today?

Our home on the farm was always full of people, events being organised and the kitchen was always naturally busy – so food and entertainment are second nature to me. I'm passionate about markets and local food– the colours, the flavours the people and produce. There is nowhere in Victoria Falls that offers Zim cuisine in such a creative and authentic environment where you can learn about the ingredients that are on the menu and be able to see how our locals live in our 1930's home.

From my travels around the world and international exposure I've learnt a high standard of service, cooking skills, timing and what our visitors want. I'm thus able to teach my staff this and ensure a balanced blend that fills this niche experience, delivering so much more for the visitor to take away with them outside the norms of just a safari albeit visiting the unique Victoria Falls.

4. One will notice a strong upcycling ethos at Dusty Road. Take us through the creative process with the space – from chairs to décor and food presentation. Where do you find the elements that have brought Dusty Road to life?

Upcycling is very much part of the community. Our locals generally don't have excess money to buy new things so they are ingenious with their creations and I've exaggerated this in a stylish way in our home. We



have bath tubs turned into chairs, tin baths made into tables, tin cups into chandeliers. Our drinking glasses are recycled from different bottles turning them into wine goblets, shot glasses or beer tumbler. Our plants are grown in old tea pots, olive oil tins and cooking pots. We use old doors and electricity cable reels as tables and our wall paper are flour sacks. Every piece has story. All of it found along my Dusty Road and as you revel in the charming set-up, you get to savour creative dishes in an atmosphere vibrating with fun and sheer enjoyment.

5. What about your journey has inspired your series of books and where can readers find them?

I created both books not only for their recipes and food but to show or remind our readers of the richness of Zimbabwe, its creatures, artefacts, culture, local produce and people blending in the lifestyles on the farms – commercial and subsistence, the vibrancy of the African bush and the indigenous foods that comes from it. But most of all the rustic, real, happy, earthy and soulful feeling of living in a place so many of us call home is what it's about for me. My first book "Dusty Road – A taste of farm life and living in Zimbabwe" is out of print but I look forward to re-doing that when time permits. During covid I was unable to get people to the restaurant so by writing the next book "Dusty Road – Town-

ship Tastes – Mealie Meal, Masau and Managing Life in Zimbabwe," I was able to get the restaurant to the people and for them to experience and learn about our project and the passion for my brand.

Books are available at Dusty Road and also available across Zimbabwe or online at www.dustyroad.africa or the E- book on Amazon.

6. You are a mom of two teens, and doing life in Zimbabwe's most prolific town of Victoria Falls. How do you balance your role as a restaurateur and entrepreneur with motherhood? Take us through how you overcome the challenges of tackling both?

I don't think I've got the balance right! My children Jack (17) and Andie (16) have always been at boarding school so between that and the incredibly supportive community both staff, friends and family who have helped me when needed, I've been able to grow my brand and at the same time provide for my kids. They have always known that what I do provides for their education, fun holidays (we are so lucky in Zimbabwe with variety on our doorstep) and a balanced lifestyle; hopefully also a good work ethic for their own lives down the road. We, like many, have hit a few pot holes on the way and had some incredibly stressful times and life changing events in the last couple of years and I also underestimated how difficult teenage years could be....and with Covid thrown in! However, it is all part of our journey, and comes with parenting, and I look forward to finding a better balance as we get into our stride in 2023 as I think we will.

7. Community. What does this term mean to you and how has, it played out in your entrepreneurial journey?

Zimbabwe is one big community. From the farms to the city, urban and rural areas. Every single one of them has been there to support, encourage and inspire me in what I have done and created. In the Chinotimba community in Victoria falls everyone knows me as "Mama Sarah", be it the lady we buy our tomatoes from, the neighbour our wood is supplied by, the upholsterer who covers our chairs, the taxi drivers who drop off our guests, the ladies who sew for us or the staff who make the restaurant work. All are part of a colourful, cheerful, hardworking community. The bonds of a community are what gets us through the tough times and it is from within communities that live real lives that my family and I learn so much from. Giving back to the community is becoming much more a focus for me as we evolve and re-engage with the international community visiting us here.

8. What does Sarah enjoy doing during her quieter moments?

I hope to have convinced your readers that running a restaurant is a hugely demanding enterprise however there are quieter moments and I cherish these. I spend them at home resting and listening to podcasts, having a cup of coffee with friends, or going on a drive into the bush to recharge and rebalance.

9. Three recent reads and your biggest take away from them?

Though I am not a great reader, I do enjoy podcasts, short inspirational books and paging through cook books and magazines. Below are some of my favourite quotes from these:

1. *La Concina de Castaman* - Fernando J. Munoz

“Time stands still to let you savour every dish. Savour has two meanings: when you savour things you can taste them or you can enjoy them. To cook, to share, to give, to decipher recipes and transform them until you find what is important.

The essential ingredient unique for each dish and for each and every one of us ...that something that makes us special; the thing that we need to find out who we are... and what we will become.”

2. *Ask and it is Given* - Esther Hicks

“Feel appreciation for what is, and eagerness for what is coming”


3. *Nigella Lawson - English food writer and television cook*

“I think we all live in a world that is so fast paced. It's threatening and absolutely saturated with change and novelty and insecurity. Therefore, the ritual of cooking and feeding my family and friends, whoever drops in, is what makes me feel that I'm in a universe that is contained”

10. What advice do you have, especially for women looking to venture into entrepreneurship, on how best to balance wearing multiple hats?

Life is all about balance – we never seem to get that right at the best of times let alone when massive impacts like covid



are thrown into the mix. However, some simple things working as an entrepreneur which might help: work with what you have got; things always take longer than you anticipate so keep some reserve in the tank whether that is funding or energy and ingenuity. It is going to be tough and will require resilience no matter what you intend or how rosy the upside is going to look – it is a slog so be prepared for it – rather like a marathon for which you do some training, know it is going to be tough especially in some parts, pushing through to the finish line enjoying the whole experience. We spend a lot of time working the process way before we get anywhere near the finished product – be it a book or a restaurant – and so enjoying that process is most important. Keep a sense of humour and be prepared to always go the extra mile and that will help you plug away at what, luckily for me, is my passion. 

A person wearing a wide-brimmed hat is shown in profile, looking through binoculars. The scene is set in a savanna landscape under a warm, golden light, likely at sunrise or sunset. The entire image has a soft, reddish-pink overlay.

ADVENTURES IN WILD AFRICA



Tongabezi:

Your ultimate luxury lodge escape on Zambia's side of the Zambezi

Zambia is one of Africa's untamed children – a place for those searching for the truly wild and wonderful moments that remain forever etched in your memory. Over 30 percent of the country is dedicated to some of the world's largest and most diverse national parks, where mighty rivers are a magnet for animals and bring life to a network of forests and grasslands. And so that would be the destination to begin our annual family summer vacation, and for an experience fuelled by countless opportunities to connect with each other, learn more about the animals teeming in the area, dissipate screen-time for a few days, while tapping into the region's history, heritage and cultures.

By Yvonne C Mtengwa

A trusted partner's recommendation for Tongabezi

We chose our good friends at Ker & Downey® Africa as our “family safari partners” for this trip, simply because we knew they would be best placed to recommend hotels and lodges that offer something unique for families travelling to Zambia with children. Ours being in the pre-teens and early teens, the question of where to go and which lodge to call home for a time is always the subject of much debate, with varied preferences typically the bane of decision making. As a leading luxury travel company, Ker

& Downey® Africa do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach and are a stand-out team to curate bespoke travel experiences. Working with award-winning travel experts guarantees you an experience that builds excitement from the point of making an inquiry, to collaborate with you in tailoring an epic travel experience meets your unique needs and interests. They recommended Tongabezi as a fantastic fit for a luxury lodge experience on the banks for the mighty Zambezi, and having heard a multitude of great things about the lodge and its ecotourism ethos, it was an easy sell for our little family!

Checking in at the enchanting Tongabezi

Our transfer took us on a short drive from further upstream of the Zambezi River, where we had stayed at another 5-star hotel, an experience also organised by Ker & Downey® Africa in their effort to offer us distinctively different stays within the same earthy, wild landscape where Zimbabwe and Zambia meet.

To discover more Ker & Downey® Africa's unique itineraries in Zambia and across the continent, start your next epic journey with them at <https://ker-downeyafrica.com/>

Arrival and check-in at Tongabezi was seamless, as we were welcomed by the young, enthusiastic team who had clearly taken their time to note the

details that would breed excitement within us. For myself in particular, the self-imposed assignment was to truly melt into our surroundings, tuning my senses into the very things that would call us to rest, relaxation and reconnection as a family after a demanding work and academic schedule. Within a few minutes of arrival, we were fully immersed in our space after having been given a brief tour of our luxurious Dog House Cottage, ahead of freshening up for our first meal at Tongabezi. Lunch was served at the main dining area, in full view of the calming expanse of the Zambezi River, a crystal clear swimming pool on the deck below, and the small islands dotting the horizon. Beautiful moments lay ahead, and I for one, couldn't wait to experience it all.

Beyond stellar accommodations for couples and families alike

Conde Nast may have called Tongabezi one of the top 20 Hotels in the World, and you will soon come to appreciate why. We were assigned The Dog House – one of three options at Tongabezi (The Garden House and Tangala House being the other two) that can accommodate up to 5 people and are available for exclusive use.

The Dog House occupies its own private world at the edge of the Tongabezi's pristine, brilliantly manicured gardens, and boasts elevated wooden walkways that connect the three separate decks which make up the expansive home. We were spoilt with two, remarkably spacious bedrooms, with a central indoor and outdoor lounge, private plunge pool, dining area and bar. Should we have preferred to have our meals prepared for us within the confines of our space, the culinary team were on hand to make sure that was a given. Each house and cottage has its own valet who acts as a private concierge and takes care of you throughout your stay.

Nothing beats the stillness of a savannah morning, with only the sound of chirping birds signalling the dawning



of a new day, and waves of the mighty Zambezi River, flowing beneath the sustainable pine decking on which our rooms sat. As the house is raised off the ground, views of hippos bobbing in and out of the water under the warm sun were a daily treat, and the huge bay windows awarded spectacular views from each window, sofa, bed and bath.

A Unique House and Cottage Concept for your riverside indulgence

The charm of Tongabezi lies in how the property combines romance and exclusivity with warm and attentive service to make your love story with Africa come true in a landscape rife with wildlife and indigenous flora. Tongabezi is an enchanting display of luxuriously decorated four River Cottages and seven Houses, each individually styled and catering for anywhere from two to five guests. Elevated use of elements such as wooden flooring, wrought iron door handles and bathroom fixtures, juxtaposed with crisp with linen bedding, drapes and plush sofas of shades of beige and creams, unveil with each turn the charming character that is at the heart of the Tongabezi design aesthetic.

For those who have chosen the banks of the Zambezi to celebrate love and each other, guests can indulge in lavish luxury at the Honeymoon House, wake up amongst the birds in the Tree House or enjoy an alfresco dinner from the private deck of their River Cottage. For us, quality time was spent together with our children, high above the river at the Dog



House, where we played board and card games as we watched the sunset on one evening, and enjoyed the view over cocktails from our plunge pool on the deck on another.

Exquisite dining experiences with health at the heart of each bite

A delightful moment of inspiration came for me as I had the opportunity to sit at the main deck over a glass of Rose, and chat with Chef Zuwi Nawa, Tongabezi's Head Chef, over Tongabezi's culinary experiences and overall food and beverage ethos. Tongabezi's farm-to-table quest in food service was evident in every serving of food; from each morning's freshly baked muffins and breads to the salads and main courses that came with lunch



and dinner.

“People nowadays, are on an active pursuit for a healthy lifestyle. They eat more vegetables, and are eating less meat, but again, being a good chef and conscious of your guest preferences, requires that you don’t put pressure on those guests who want to indulge in a little more of this and that. Rather, you understand what they want and work to guide their food experience so it combines the use of wholesome ingredients while embellishing them with taste and textures they travelled so far to experience,” Chef Zuwi shared, when I asked him what was at the heart of his team’s passion for curating dining experiences to relish while at Tongabezi.

An array of activities to get up to at Tongabezi

We had the opportunity over lunch to talk through what activities we wanted to take on during our family safari experience while in Zambia, and as mentioned before, when traveling with family, key to ensuring enjoyment for all is staying at hotels and lodges that take an individualised approach to a curated hospitality.

We loved that we had no set itinerary to adhere to, and the team was fluid enough to allow us to change our course depending on how we felt at any given moment. After all, this trip was purely about reconnection with each other in the throngs of nature first, and plenty of time set aside for relaxation. Dad and son opted for a mountain bike ride into the nearby communities to learn a little bit about village life, especially for my boy who hasn’t grown up in the traditional African setting; be it in the city or country. One big



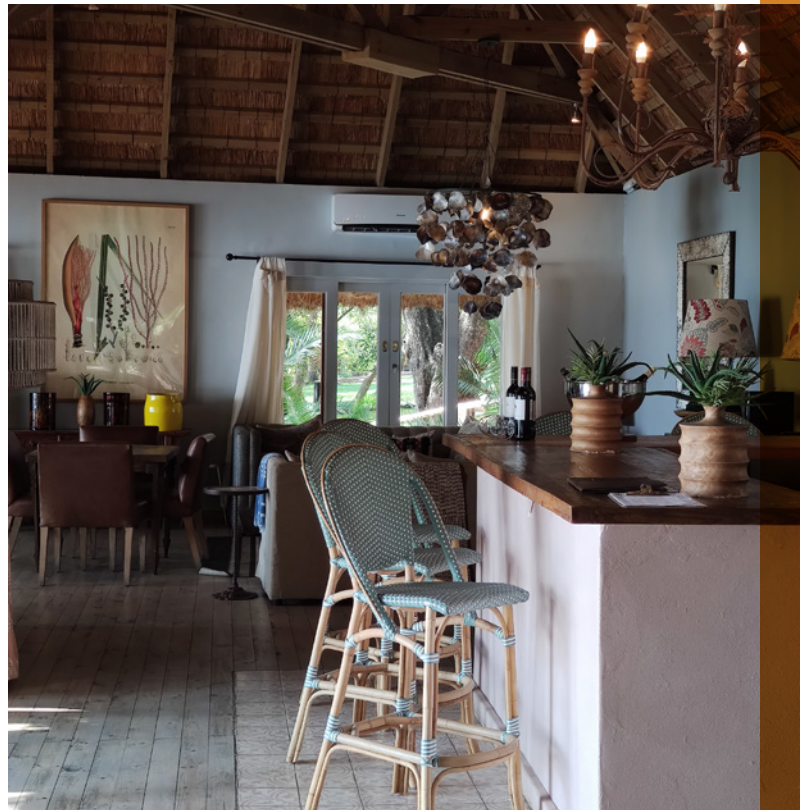


on learning, it was an absolute treat for the 10 year old in our family to learn more about how local communities are sustained by contributions of well-wishers on holiday, and do so first by cycling through the bush with a guide.

My daughter and I – the more adventurous of our four, got an early start for a swim in the Devil’s Pool on morning, an experience we both will never forget! If you’ve never heard of the Devil and Angel’s Pool swims, renowned for attracting thrill-seekers from around the world with an unaided swim from the shores of the Zambezi River at Livingstone Island, to the edge of the plummeting Victoria Falls, this activity is one not to miss. Our journey began

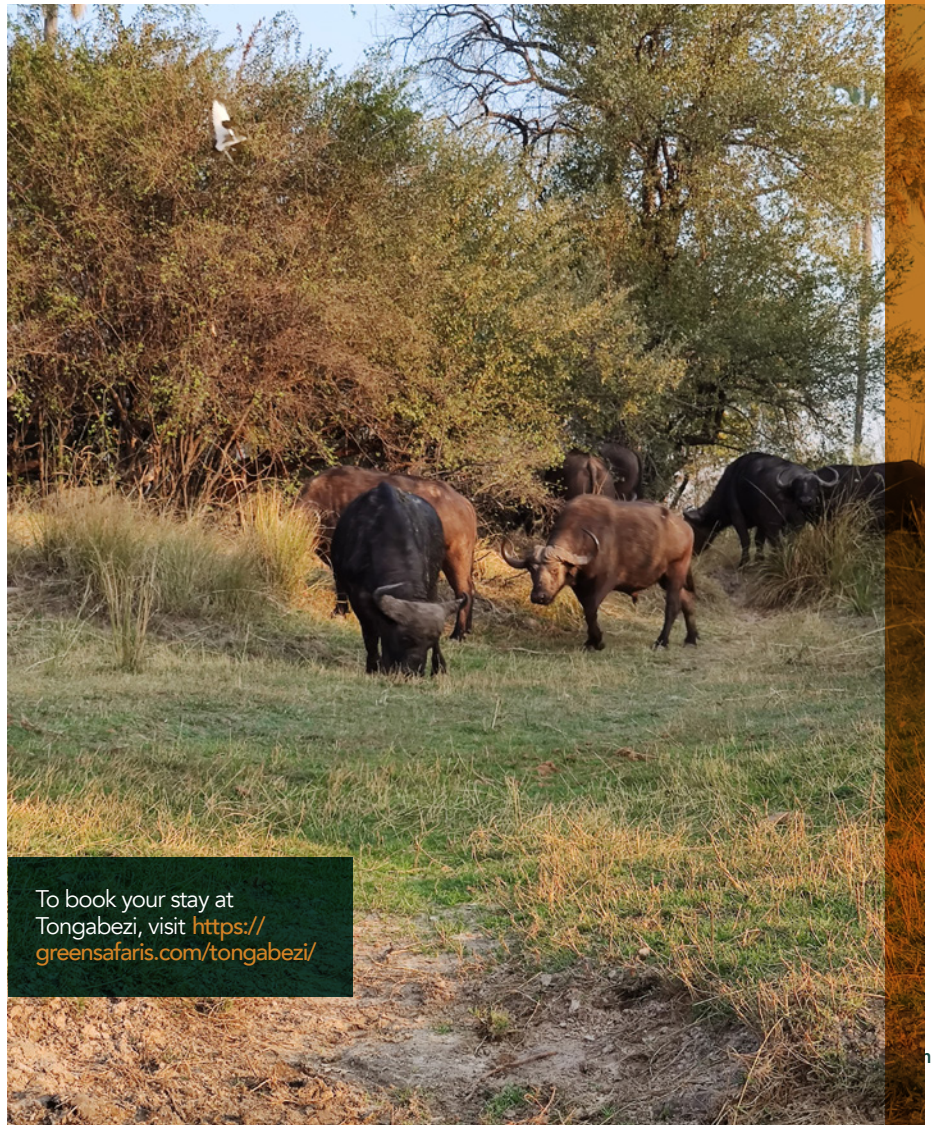
after a quick breakfast with a transfer to the team that would take us on our epic adventure for that morning. Rigorous and adrenaline-pumping an experience, getting back to Tongabezi and enjoying yet another hearty lunch and refreshing beverages was a treat we looked forward to, with more moments with nature on the cards for later in the day.

Our afternoon family activities encompassed boat rides and fishing excursions on the Zambezi, a beautiful opportunity to learn about and see the river’s wilder inhabitants such as crocodiles, hippos, monitor lizards, elephants and buffalos. It seemed as if the animals had received the memo that we were at Tongabezi



for a few nights, as we enjoyed full view of many of these in their numbers during our fishing and sunset cruises on the river. We also had the opportunity to partake of a signature Tongabezi experience – wrapping up a sunset cruise with the Sand Bar – a drinks and snacks spread as we watched the sunset from a small island in full view of the glistening river. Connecting with other guests and sharing conversation on what brought us to Africa in that moment, was a mesmerising reminder of the circle of life and the restorative nature of travel to Africa’s wide open spaces.

Tongabezi joined the Green Safaris portfolio of properties in February 2020, and have been on the pulse of creating distinctive eco-tourism experiences for visitors to Malawi and Zambia. We were fortunate to be counted on the list of guests that enjoyed the magic of Tongabezi recently, and for us as parents keen on instilling a love of Africa and its coveted natural resources in our children, the team’s passion for delivering unforgettable experiences, and preserving the most pristine areas of African nature, really shone through. From laughter shared, sumptuous servings in our meals, a sense of being with family when we were in camp, and the intimacy awarded to us with our stay in The Dog House, this family holiday ranks highly on our list of “would love to go again” destinations. 



To book your stay at Tongabezi, visit <https://greensafaris.com/tongabezi/>



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Off the beaten track in Ghana's Mole Game Reserve

Africa and Safari go hand-in-hand as this entire continent is a dream for nature and wildlife fanatics from across the globe. Every safari destination has its own special virtues, and in Ghana's Northern region, Mole National Park is best known for the quality of its accommodation, peaceful and carefully managed private reserves, and its diversity of landscapes and ecosystems.

By Selorm Sosu

Mole National Park is a wilderness seemingly untouched by civilization. Although difficult to reach, it carries a charm and beauty which is deemed infectious by those who dare venture out for some exploration across Ghana's remarkably diverse settings, both in complexity and composition. With mysterious beauties unfolding across the span of the country, Mole is one such place.

What makes Mole so special

Mole stands out bold and truly is an awesome place in which nature's architectures is displayed. Revealing stunning panoramic views, and perched high up on a ridge, overlooking the surrounding wooded savannah, it appears as a carved piece of the landscape, jutting out of the hillside, with the ridge extending in a crescent from southeast to the southwest. It is a spectacular view to behold, and boasts an activity-filled waterhole down below, where crocodiles cruise, antelopes graze, elephants bath and monkeys play. It's a unique and isolated landscape where a myriad of unique creatures roam about and where in times past, has been considered a haven for hunters.

The watering holes capture precious rains, and also receives water trickling from nearby streams, making the general landscape quite replete with water. Mole Game Reserve is not





unusual with the abundance in fauna it possesses, but it has been known to carry a sense of peculiarity and reminiscence of bygone days' untainted by the effect of commerce. Birdlife is also powerfully present as graceful aerobic golden orioles' flute penetrate one's dream at dawn. Down in the plains are a variety of king fisher's preying in silence; while flocks of bee-eaters dig nests in the banks bulldozed by elephants.

The Elephants of Mole

You'll find an abundance of these gentle giants in Mole; and there are two types of elephants at Mole; the savannah and the forest type. Savannah elephants are deep grey in colour and found as you may have guessed it, in the

Keen on visiting Mole? Contact detravelingfotografa@gmail.com or WhatsApp number +233244411375 to learn more about how you too can discover the off the beaten track Mole Game Reserve

savannah areas of Ghana. One can watch elephants for hours at a time; yet sooner or later, it's common for their behaviours to shift so abruptly, such as mowing the grass with its toenail or drawing their the tusks from the rotted carcass of another elephant, carrying them off into the bush. With a life span that ranges between 55years to 70years, their gestation period sits at 22 months! This is a long time by any stretch, and so no wonder the death of any elephant is indeed a tremendous loss to the animal kingdom.

Wildlife encounters in the Throngs of Mole

A short safari trip in a 4x4 vehicle can take you, in the morning, into the Savannah to view the endangered Western Kobe, the beautifully painted bush pig. The Kobe herds are easily seen because of their apparent disregard for motorized vehicles as they descend upon you, fearless of their surrounding plains and eager to spend the night on the range in small herds, easily a few hundred yards from your room. Antelope are seen afar foraging in the bush for what to eat and also a safe place to rest. Many species of the duiker, the smallest of antelopes which come no larger than a dog, are usually seen diving for cover, while the timid white -thighed colobus monkeys, quickly disappear at the slightest scent of human approach for fear of poachers.

A long haul drive can take you deeper into the reserve, an excellent trip for the spirited adventurer. You'll find a number of camps within the reserve, and for the visitors booked for overnight stays, there are caves which abound in the ridge to the north



of the park, however these are only accessible in the dry season.

It's an amazing experience to also explore Mole on foot, but it is recommended that one does so in full-length clothing, preferably jeans or thick pants, a good pair of boots, and two-litres of water for hydration, with a guide to lead you down into the plain. Dawn is most comfortable to venture out for most in the cool of a walking breeze, however the evening may yield more wildlife encounters.

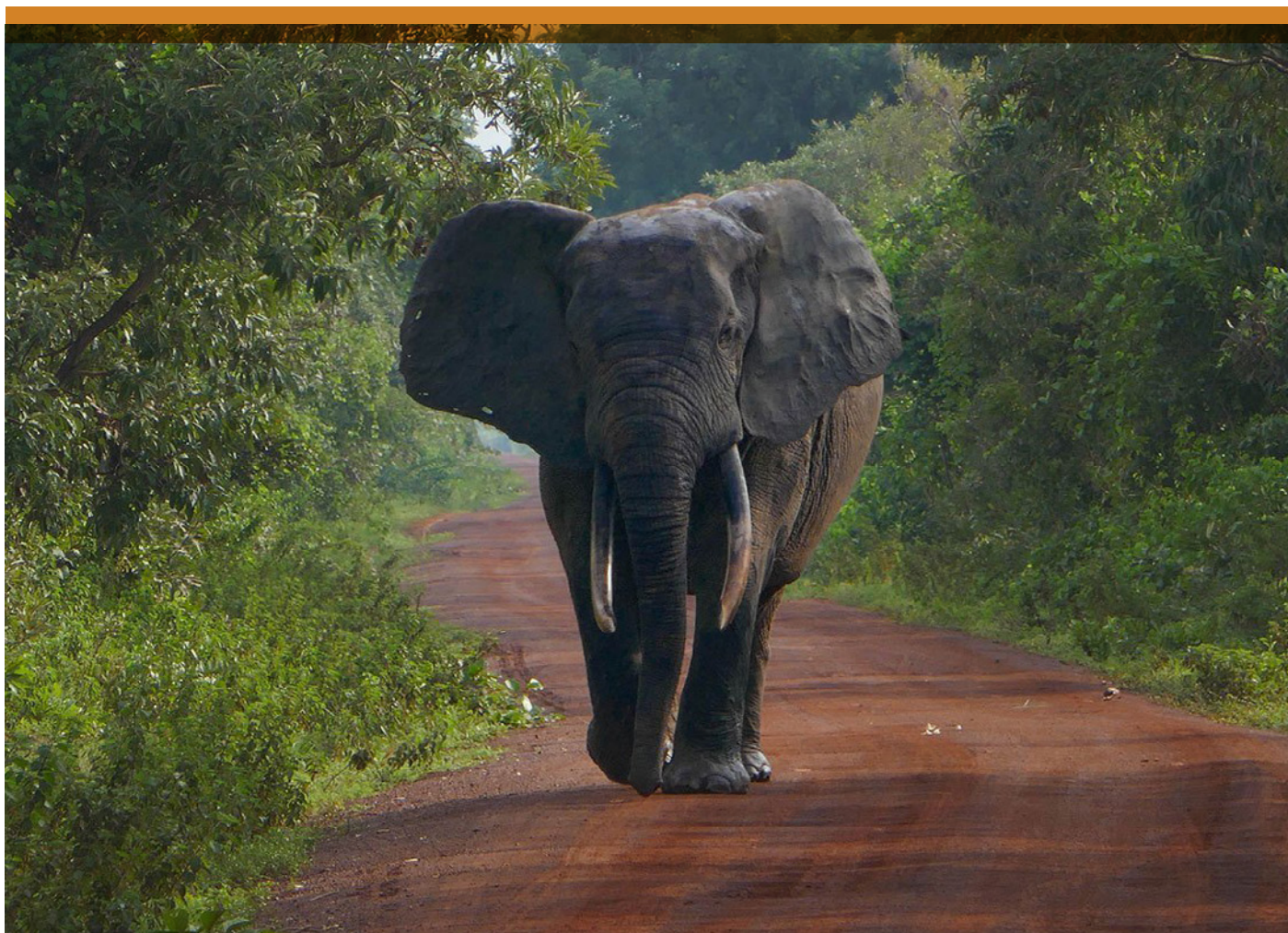
Also in the view from the ridge, a kilometre to the south are the watering holes, where you sometimes encounter bathing elephants. It's also fascinating to see the giant monitor lizards and their young

often creeping within the overhanging branches, while herds of buffalo and big cats roam nearby. Visitors are discouraged from moving alone but rather in groups and under the care of a guide to avoid the heightened possibility of being attacked by the wilder groups of animals. It is for this reason that guides typically venture into the plains with a raffle in hand to protect the tourist in the event of the threat of an attack. The leopard and the lion, now practically poached to extinction, are in fact a rare find and mostly hunt by night.

Where to lay your head

A stay at Mole is undoubtedly more rustically earthy than glamorous, with dormitory-style, moderate chalets

covering a few acres on the edge of the imposing ridge. Mole is a place to visit again and again, and as night falls there is little to do but just relax. In Mole, there's no piped music, no native entertainment, and no raucous shouts, but just the absolute sound of Africa in its wildest and most natural element. Perhaps what makes it that much special is how isolated it is from the regular, more mainstream tourism destination. Yet the promise of wild adventure, the rustic charm of the accommodations and the laid back lazy way of life when there, carries with it an experience far from the madding crowd, and one you will harness memories from. ^{AW}





Singita Sweni Lodge:
A riverine oasis in the heart
of the Kruger National Park



With plenty to love about this stunning property, Singita Sweni Lodge is popular with a safari goer looking for an intimate, cocooning and personal experience. Its intimate size of only seven suites and its position - snugly tucked into the banks of the Sweni River - give it a private and peaceful atmosphere, perfect for a stay that offers respite from daily life.



Although guests to Singita Kruger National Park have the benefit of exclusive access to 33,000 acres of pristine wilderness, they needn't venture far from their suites to enjoy the intricate ecosystem of this rich and diverse landscape. The lodge's proximity to the Sweni River means that during your stay, you're privy to the daily routines of birds, insect, reptile and mammal species who visit the river.

Designed to embrace nature and give guests an immersive experience, the suites at Sweni, while almost hidden, are walls of glass at the front, allowing immediate access to all of the sights, sounds and smells of the bush. A spacious deck, and outdoor shower, and the

signature Sweni sleep-out experience is perfect to experience absolute stillness and a profound sense of calm.

Architecture and interiors are informed and inspired by the landscape, and the design of Sweni Lodge serves to create a seamless flow between inside and out, and pays tribute to the rich palette of nature.

In the main lodge, a firepit and the marble bar offer spaces to sit and soak in the ambient sounds of your surroundings, while enjoying your morning coffee or afternoon sundowner.

A Haven for Wildlife

A haven for both guests and wildlife, during your stay at Singita Sweni Lodge you are likely



to experience the wealth of wildlife that this region is known for. This area is a global destination for seeing lion, elephant, rhino, buffalo and leopard) as well as a plethora of others – from hippos, to cheetah and rare antelope like sable, along with a kaleidoscope of birdlife. The area is famous for its large lion prides.

Singita's expert Field Guides – passionate conservationists and nature lovers as well as skilled hosts – will ensure you leave with a wealth of knowledge about this beautiful area, as well as skilfully steer your experience through the spectrum of the bush's beauty.

In step with nature – experience the wilderness on foot

Stepping out into the unspoilt wilderness is a visceral experience – a profound awakening of the senses. Twigs crunch underfoot, fresh air fills your lungs and the African sun warms your skin. Elephants trumpet in the distance and every sound seems amplified; with mud splashes and dust marking your shoes and clothing with the tell-tale signs of a morning well spent.

At Singita, guided bush walks are seamlessly personalised. Your adventure starts just before sunrise, and after a thorough

safety briefing – steaming cup of coffee in hand. Whether it's the pursuit of birds, learning how to track big cats and mammals, or simply choosing to appreciate the breathtaking landscapes – every outing is tailored around the preferences of the group.

A walking safari welcomes entirely different encounters. It's a great way to appreciate smaller wildlife which cannot easily be seen from vehicles; you can reach exquisitely remote areas that aren't accessible when driving; it gives new meaning to being off the beaten track. Walking through the bush in complete silence has an almost sacred quality to it, and it heightens the senses in quiet meditation. With

each step, you'll feel yourself being grounded again.

Catering exclusively for the interests and fitness levels of individual guests, every walk varies in distance and scenery, with expertly trained guides briefing guests on all the necessary hand signs and protocols to be observed for their safety – and to respect the area's precious wildlife and wilderness. Walks mostly happen in the mornings as afternoons are mostly too hot, and in general, the age requirement is 16 years or older. Easier nature walks are occasionally arranged for younger guests at the discretion of Field Guides.

With no barriers between you and

your surroundings, each walk is also a return to your own natural state. This unfiltered freedom to connect with the earth in the simplest of ways ties in perfectly with Singita's emphasis on enduring wellness – and a guest experience that invites authentic wellbeing throughout.

Located in the southeastern reaches of South Africa's Kruger National Park – an iconic safari destination that spans four distinct ecological zones and is renowned for its rugged beauty – Singita's lodges in a private concession here within this iconic reserve are the quintessence of South African safari. Singita Lebombo & Sweni Lodges may be accessed by private air char-






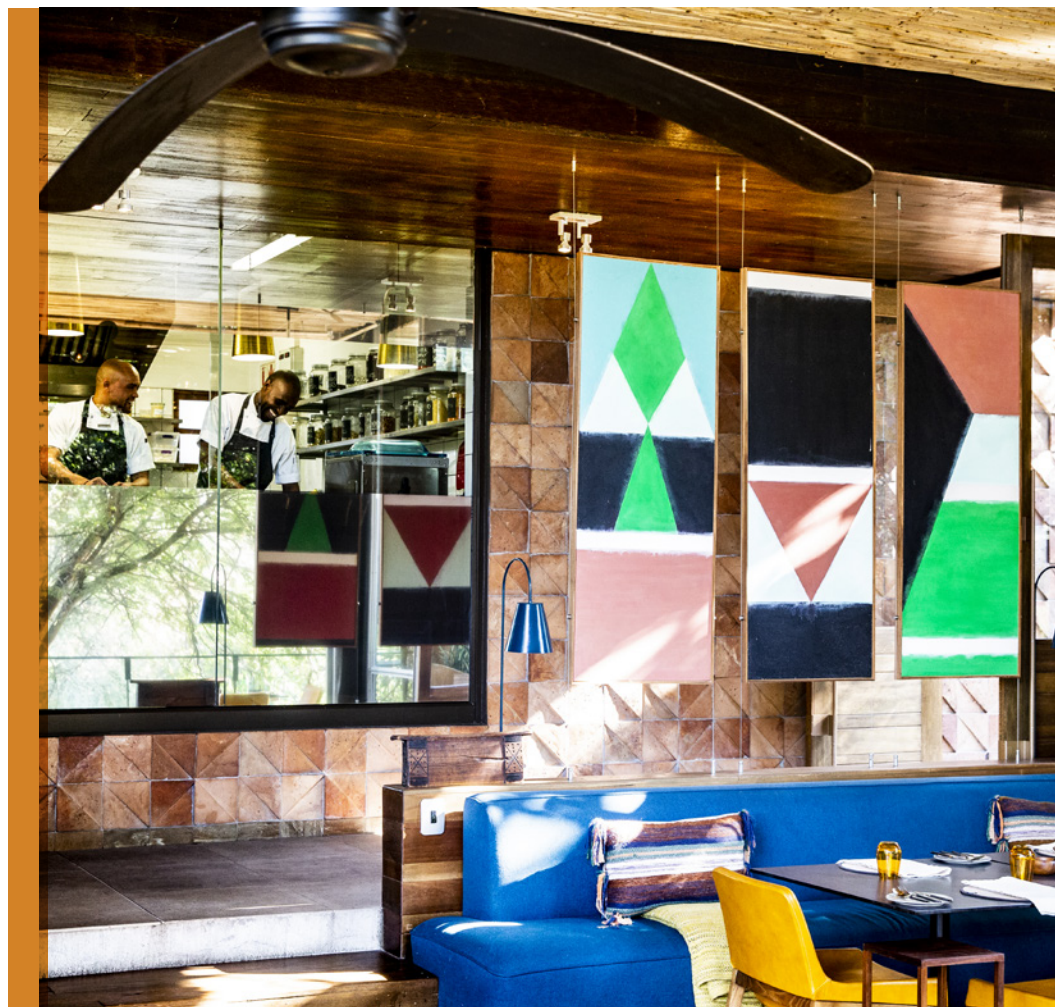
To book your stay at Singita Sweni, or at any of its remarkable properties within its portfolio, visit www.singita.com

ter directly to the lodge or on the scheduled air services on Federal Air. Flights to the lodge can only be operated during daylight hours and restrictions do apply.

A journey to wholeness

A stay at Singita aims to reach much deeper than a fleeting treatment or the transient pleasure a short-lived trip can do. Rather, it creates lasting transformation and a sense of belonging that remains, through giving guests the space and freedom to craft a journey true to them.

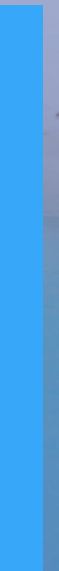
The philosophy at Singita has always been holistically inspired, in that they believe that true wellness is on every level - physical, spiritual and mental. Creating harmony and balance between all the aspects of their beings, to create overall wellbeing. Harmony with your surroundings – through a reverence for the environment and the relationships that have been nurtured with the communities who call them home – is part of considering the whole. 







THE WANDERLUST WITHIN



A Stay at The Victoria Falls Hotel

and the art of travelling mindfully

By Marcia Mcleod



Due to the persistent demands of work and life, a few months ago I began questioning myself about what I really wanted out of life. The truth is, I was no longer feeling the level of joy I desire, and everything post-pandemic seemed to have exacerbated how I was feeling. Add to that was the fact that the many healthy boundaries I had put in place were no longer being honoured in my view. I had hit an all-time low.

As I pondered and examined these feelings more deeply, I was approached by not one but two amazing women from within my network, both expressing their desires to work with me in my capacity of being a wellness coach, with a view to running specially curated retreats! How did they know? I wondered, as this was literally something I had been dreaming of but was not sure how I could make it happen. I can say now, time and time again I have seen the power of manifestation, and that the beauty of what we think and do shall be if we believe it and work to achieve it.

Taking relaxation to new heights and the benefits of short breaks

Now that my children are all settled in their respective lives back in the UK, I began to seriously consider the offer that Yvonne C. Mteng-

wa, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Travel Essence Magazine, and also proudly Zimbabwean, proposed. I decided to join her on an imminent trip to the motherland, Zimbabwe, and the destination was going to Victoria Falls to be exact!

I can't lie there were some initial feelings of guilt that started to flood in. "Should I really be going off on holiday?"

"What will the kids say as they have not really had a break since before 2020?"

"Can I really afford to take more time off work?"

But the more I focused on the reasons I shouldn't go, the more my intuition was bubbling and that deep pull in the pit of my stomach began to present more and more reasons why I should!

Rest & recalibration begins before take-off

As we closed the final quarter of 2022, I was also in the space where I am looking at how I would like my 2023 and beyond to look, so this was the time I chose to focus on what adjustments, plans and connections I needed to make in order for things to happen in the way I envisioned them. As Yvonne started to share snippets of the endless possibilities the trip to Zimbabwe would present, leaning into my intuition is something I became more and more conscious of and understanding that how my life unfolds is ultimately the result of the decisions I make. Every decision is absolutely critical and will take you along a particular trajectory, ultimately making up the sum total of one's life. The right decision keeps you aligned to what your unique path in life is. That being said, it became more and more glaringly obvious that it would simply be a sin not to go. So, I said yes!

Our journey began in the early

hours of the morning of Saturday 26th November, after what was an exceptionally long week for me. In addition to moving home, this trip could not have come sooner or at a better time! One could argue it was divine timing. Flying from Dubai on Ethiopian Airways via Addis Ababa was the most viable way to get to Victoria Falls. What can I tell you? From the moment we stepped off the plane in Victoria Falls, we were greeted and accompanied through the seamless process of obtaining my visit visa (\$55 on arrival), after which we grabbed our bags as the lovely Judith from Victoria Falls Hotel was right on cue to meet us.

I was so ready to embark upon our holistic African Adventure, which I believed at the point of having agreed to go, would impact both my mental and emotional wellbeing. Nothing prepared me for the inaugural traditional dance with the amazing all-male dance group situated just outside the doors of the airport! The feeling of euphoria was indescribable, and still today, as I had truly touched down in the motherland.

After much laughter and enjoyment whilst I danced and made a total fool of myself with a spear and shield in hand, it was time to catch my breath as we headed towards our pre-arranged transfer, which would take us from the airport directly to the hotel, approximately a 25-minute drive. As our transfer pulled into the grounds of the beautiful Victoria Falls Hotel, this was when the VIP treatment truly began. The feeling that I had finally "arrived home" is one I will never forget.

Highlights of my Victoria Falls Hotel experience

As a novice, this is a great place to start a safari trip. This charming location is a wonderful iconic hotel that is situated approximately a 15-minute stroll from the gates to the Falls, and so you are able to get an amazing view of the water vapour from the Falls right from the pristine, carefully manicured gardens. As expected, this almost 120-year-old property is very grand and colonial in style, with an atmosphere that transports





you back in time, as the public rooms and areas are full of interesting pictures from that era. The hotel has recently undergone some fabulous renovations, which certainly encapsulate an eclectic mix of centuries of history with all the mod cons.


I have to say, I really enjoyed my stay there. The first night I ate at Jungle Junction (where breakfast is also served) which was excellent. We enjoyed a full buffet spread of local and international

fair, which included grilled crocodile tail, Ostrich meat, and Zimbabwean boerewors, all accompanied by a mammoth selection of organic medleys of salads and vegetables, washed down by a varied selection of soft and alcoholic beverages. We were simultaneously entertained by a traditional dance group who took us through the various cultural stages of Zimbabwean and Zambian indigenous culture through dance.

Being able to “just be” - was some-

thing that was a top priority for me on this trip. So having the option to just sit guilt free and enjoy the hotel terrace was a plus! As I sipped on my sunset-coloured Malawi Shandy, a very popular Zimbabwean mocktail (the addition of alcohol is a welcomed option) made from a refreshing mix of ginger beer, lemon soda, bitters, orange juice, a slice of lemon, I watched the warthogs run across the lawn intermittently joined by the ever cheeky baboons.

I was so fortunate to also partake in a brand new concept, a decadent wine pairing experience where we were escorted (in the rain) to a “secret” location in the cellar, which I may add was created solely by using upcycled material from the recent refurbishment. This is a phenomenally unique experience and one I highly recommend. Our taste buds were tantalized by the culinary art of an amazing three-course delicious menu, carefully paired with delicious South African wines. We were taken on a gastronomic journey where we were schooled on the various flavours and tones by our knowledgeable and extremely service-orientated Sommelier Simba.

In summary, if you are looking for a gentle ease into Sub-Saharan Africa, where you can find some calm to reset and reclaim your mental space, choose Victoria Falls, and the Victoria Falls for your stay while in town! The staff are incredibly friendly and attentive, and you get a nice balance of being in touch with nature whilst having all the modern conveniences. Food is fresh and hearty, accommodations luxurious with an ode to the colonial influences of which the hotel is known for, and time spent there is beyond restful. This was the first stop of my trip to Victoria Falls Zimbabwe, however, one that totally re-awakened my senses and gave me the strong sense of reward I was longing for! 



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ELE | NA elevates senses on
Maldives' Bolifushi Island





There is no doubt that a visit to the unique islands of Maldives is unforgettable. Not only because 99 percent of this tiny nation is ocean, but simply because of its outstanding beauty.

The explorer and archaeologist Thor Heyerdahl, famous for his Kon-Tiki expedition and historical discoveries in Maldives sums it up perfectly in his book "The Maldivian Mystery":

“That afternoon we passed the most beautiful palm islands I have ever seen. With the sun low on our starboard side, it threw a glowing sidelight on the tiny islets, which seemed to float by like flower baskets ... Under the spell of this picture of an earthy paradise I made an entry in my notebook that the Maldives are even more beautiful than any of the coral atolls in Polynesia.”

Heyerdahl was not the last one to fall in love with the islands. Prince William and his wife Kate enjoyed the islands in 2014 and Celebrities like the Beckham family, Kate Moss and countless Hollywood actors like Leonardo DiCaprio, Tom Cruise and Milla Jovovich

In 2023, Bolifushi Island will be the centre of a conscious balance between wellness and indulgence with the resort’s healing ‘Wellness Your Way’ journeys that are designed to blend healthy practices with a quintessential Maldivian holiday experience. The program offers three brackets—Wellness Seeker, Wellness Rendezvous, and Wellness Rejuvenation—to suit the individual guest’s desired holistic goals.

ELE | NA, which stands for Elements of Nature, creates spa and wellness experiences inspired by the elemental energies of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. The international spa company is part of the Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts brand, and they have teams of experts in all their global resorts combining local healing traditions with international spa treatments for holistic healing journeys that leave guests feeling rejuvenated and refreshed.

Unpacking the Ele | Na Ethos

The ELE | NA Elements of Nature spa and wellness centres focus on Ayurvedic principles of holistic nutrition and wellbeing by infusing the five natural elements—earth, water,

wood, metal, and fire—to create epic journeys of healing. The wellness centre at OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI Maldives is equipped with the expertise of an ayurvedic doctor and specialists, holistic therapists, energy healers, movement and wellness experts, and nutritional professionals. Whatever be the guests' end goals relating to healthy living, the ELE | NA team curates an apt wellness journey, specific to each of them. This includes conscious meal plans, plant-based menus, and a passionate homecare team to provide wellness mindset mentoring so guests follow through with their holistic practice even after the retreat is over.

The programme also includes private treatments and retreat





activities like yoga, meditation, sound healing, floating meditation, breathing exercises, beach walks, fitness plans, and more. Guests can select their wellness journey of choice, number of days, and then let the experts take over. The retreat blends the best possible spa therapies, designed to take guests to their desired destination of emotional intelligence and mindfulness.

Your options for Wellness Your Way

Wellness Your Way offers a choice of three journeys: Wellness Seeker, Wellness Rendezvous, and Wellness Rejuvenation. While Wellness Seeker and Wellness Rendezvous can be booked during the stay at the resort, Wellness Rejuvenation requires pre arrival reservation.

Wellness Seeker

This programme is an enriching starting point for a person who is getting acquainted with wellness. Guests can choose treatments from a bespoke a la carte therapy menu or consult with an Ayurvedic Doctor who will perform pulse examination, constitution analysis, and then provide corrective diet plans and treatments. On the menu are energy and sound healing therapies, virtual neuro-linguistic programming sessions, deep tissue massages, scalp acupressure, and more.

Wellness Rendezvous

Apt for someone who has experienced wellness journeys in the past, this programme takes it up a notch wherein guests get to experience two to three hours of bespoke wellness experiences daily, while still luxuriating in the many

pleasures of their vacation at OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI. An Ayurvedic Doctor will prescribe recommended therapies and conscious nutrition plans.

Guests can opt for journeys with various end goals like chronic pain management, stress management, gut health, sleep therapy, weight loss, and more. Some of the specialist therapies include Shirodhara (hot oil pour), Abhyangam (full-body massage with rhythmic strokes and herbal oil), and Udhwathanam (a weight loss massage that involves dry deep-tissue treatments with herbal powders to reduce cellulite and tone the body).



Visit <https://ele-na.com/> to learn more about ELE | NA – Elements of Nature

Wellness Rejuvenation

An immersive wellness retreat, this programme involves a deep dive by the Ayurvedic Doctor to understand the guests' various ailments and stressors and offer remedial treatments, therapies, conscious nutrition plans, and wellness activities. The guest villas will transform into guests' own personal and private wellness enclave, replete with organic, bespoke amenities like hand-crafted snacks, wellness attire, fitness equipment, turndown shots at night, indulgent bath rituals, and ambience enrichers to promote a complete state of relaxation.

Guests can opt for journeys with various end goals like chronic pain management, anxiety and stress management, gut health, sleep therapy, weight loss, and more. Some of the therapies include face lift massages, lymphatic drainage treatments, 'Under the Stars' healing involving Pranic healing and sound therapy, intuitive therapy, Kati Vashti (for



lower back pain), Navara Mukhalepam (luxurious fruit face masks), Nasyam (sinus cleansing), Podikizhi (warm poultice massage), private bonfire meditation, and more.

Inside the OZEN COLLECTION

THE OZEN COLLECTION creates timeless sanctuaries that exude tranquillity and inspiration. An abundance of sophisticated experiences seamlessly blended with a grand sense of space and design, tailored wellness journeys, and an enriching culture set apart the brand's two resorts in the Maldives. OZEN LIFE MAADHOO, the first resort under this brand, opened in July 2016 and OZEN RESERVE BOLIFUSHI, launched in December 2020.

The brand's success story continues, with three distinct new properties. A lavish stately city experience in India at OZEN MANSION KOLKATA opening in late 2023 and a soulful, sustainable sanctuary in the Maldivian isle of OZEN PRIVÉ ATHIRI GILI set for late 2024. The third resort in the pipeline, OZEN SECLUDED TANGALLE will take the brand to Sri Lanka. 



5 Things That Make Zanzibar Island The Perfect Paradise

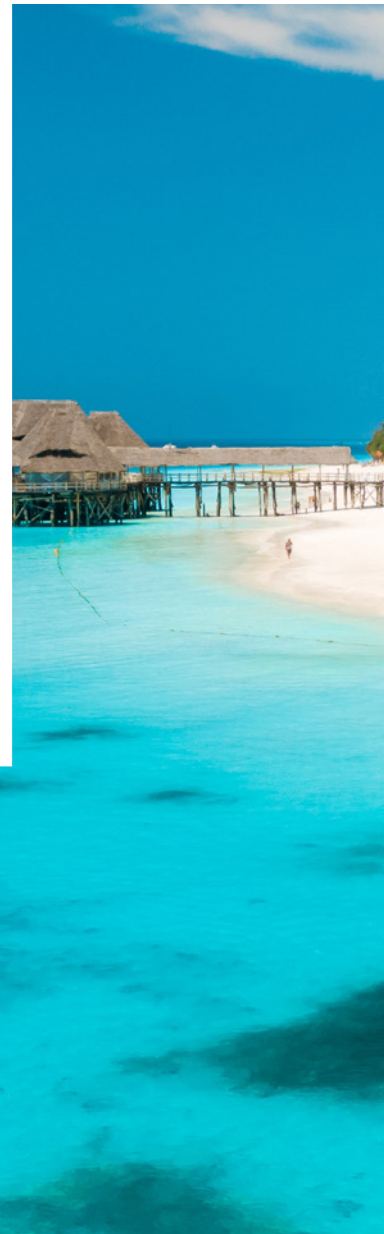
By Bianca Ndou

This year I decided to gift myself something unique for my birthday, as it was a milestone birthday. A whole Thirty-Fine years on this earth deserves to be celebrated accordingly. I decided I would take myself for a short escape out of the “sand box”, what us expats call the Middle East for the perceived bubble that it may sometimes feel like living and working here.

Normally I’m big on planning but for once, I just wanted to wing it as I go. I had encountered some health issues that year and I wasn’t able to participate in very hectic activities, so Zanzibar Island seemed an ideal location for relaxation and recovery. So I didn’t make any solid plans except booking the flight and accommodation, and as it turned out, it truly was the perfect location for such spontaneity. It would turn out to be one of the highlights of my travel adventure and annual birthday celebrations. Here are some of the reasons why I loved it there:

1. HEAVENLY BEACH

Upon doing my research about where to stay and looking through various hotel sites and accommodation booking apps, it became apparent that Nungwi beach was the ideal location for the kind of vibe I was going for. That is, the lively beach, where people know



no sleep and you can enjoy a serene morning, an active afternoon and a vibrant nightlife – is in fact an understatement!

The best time to see the beach in all its glory would be in the morning, before it's filled with the noise of enthusiastic tourists and "beach boys" selling a whole variety of souvenirs and trinkets. I advise that one takes a stroll around 8am, as it truly is a sight to behold. Crystal flawless white sands, glossy blue water and glowing sky come with each turn. Many would agree that it is impossible to capture the beauty in a single picture however, whatever you do muster will be perfectly Instagram-worthy, with no filter required.

The beautiful sunset is not to be ignored in all its blazing hues! At this point the beach starts to transition from the lazy afternoon napping mode to mid-tempo music in the restaurants and happy hour offers and deals in the restaurants and bars. The tourists who went for activities in the afternoon return, eager to relax, sunset watch and quench their thirst with cold beverages.



2. DELICIOUS FOOD & REFRESHING BEVVIES

Foodies will be spoiled for choice, with an abundant variety of international and local cuisine. The best part is that food is quite affordable on the beach restaurants, as a decent main course ranges from 18 000 – 25 000 Tanzanian Shillings (which is about US\$ 7 – 10).

There were a plethora of beverages from healthy, to fresh fruit juices made on the spot, coconut drinks, mocktails and cocktails. For the revelers who enjoy strong drinks, all your poisons are available and pocket friendly, as cocktails and spirits ranged between US\$4 – 6, with beers coming in at about \$3.

The coconut drink is a must try! The local women with cute little fruit stalls, will cut and peel the coconut for you while you wait and give you a little spoon shaped bark to eat out the coconut "meat" as they call it, after finishing the drink. If you request the fruit tray, they will cut all the various fruits while you wait and arrange the succulent and colorful fruits on a tray. The passion in doing this is just fascinating to see, and the fruit's refreshing tanginess will not disappoint under the warmth of the Zanzibari skies.

3. PEOPLE & CULTURE

Now, you may find contrasting extremes when it comes to the people. On one hand there are those with pushy selling techniques; and on the other hand we have the very laid back, chilling in the realest "hakuna matata" form you'll ever see. In fact, they can suggest all the hot party spots to go to later on. On that note, another trait worth noting about the people is how they are so helpful and resourceful with information about the area, tips to get around and directions to get where you need to go.

One would be highly fascinated by the friendliness of the Maasai "warriors" in their sturdy form with a spear in hand on the beaches. They are a fine sight, in their bold and colorful garments and hand-made body ornamentation. You could be fooled into assuming that they are scary with their weapon in hand. On the contrary they are quite approachable and eager to offer assistance to tourists. You can't help but get the sense



that they are very much aware that they visually stand out as they never miss an opportunity to flirt, if given the chance.

Interesting to note was that there were not so many local women roaming the beach, but the few I spotted were either selling fruits, food, ornaments, braiding western women's hair or offering spa services. They seemed to have an enterprising culture in general and mostly conservatively dressed, probably as a result of the Islamic norms as this was a popular trade route during the Arab rule on the island once upon a time.

4. ACCESS TO ACTIVITIES AND THE MASAI MARKET

Depending on the kind of tourist you are, some people prefer an action-packed itinerary, while others, such as myself, opt for laying around on the beach for example. Activities are endless, catering to a variety of preferences, such as swimming with the turtles, the Stonetown Tour, sunset cruise, jet skiing and so on. While you're on the beach there are several tour guides and service providers at your disposal, and there will be several activities to choose from, as well as room for negotiation on the prices. Unlike other destinations where you have to book in advance, make pre-payments or deposits for activities, the opposite is the case with this paradise island.

The Masai Market is a wonderful exhibition of the Maasai's cultural artefacts, however, let me just put out a disclaimer that it can be a very overwhelming experience because there is so much aggressive competition between the vendors trying to sell to tourists. Moreover, they can hike up the prices exorbitantly too. The best way to approach the market is to make sure you know how much you're willing to spend on certain items and start the bargain wars based on that. When you really feel that the price is too high, be prepared to walk out of the stall and 9 out of 10 times the price of the same item will be dropped significantly.

You will find very unique and gorgeous items at the market, perfect for gifts and souvenirs for yourself and loved ones. Take time to look around, don't be in a rush to buy because as you



go deeper in the market the items become more and more beautiful. I would suggest that you put a budget aside just for the market, as you will want to buy so many things.

What stood out to me the most at the markets was:


- **The wooden sculptures of buildings, people, animals (mainly the “Big Five”) and kitchen utensils**
- **Beaded Accessories such as earrings, necklaces, head gear and sandals**
- **Textiles and wall paintings displaying their tradition in various forms**
- **Kitenges, kikois and khangas, which are different types of maasai traditional cloth**
- **Souvenir T-shirts, colorful sisal and tote bags, which are all very rich in quality**
- **Wide range of spices and teas**

5. SAFETY FOR THE SOLO-FEMALE TRAVELER

Naturally solo travelers, particularly female ones, may worry about safety, and for us who have been spoiled by the high safety we experience living in the UAE, it was important that we understood the do’s and don’ts of getting around while on the Island. We visited as two females and we had to do due diligence in research about safety because while everything is a walking distance away, safety

should always be of genuine concern.

We were safe, comfortably walking around in the evenings from our hotel to the beach restaurants for dinner. We never encountered any serious problems, apart from the odd cat calling by “beach boys” here and there, which I imagine is quite typical for any tourist town or busy city as you navigate it on foot. On the night of my birthday we went to a Halloween party and the most popular night club on the beach. It was all fun and no sense of danger while we were there. The bulk of the people were tourists anyway who were just out to have a good time. We managed to walk back to the hotel safely around 3am. I suggest that you also ask the hotel staff where you’ll be staying for some safety hacks, which areas to avoid and so forth.

There are so many more things that will make you fall in love with this pristine, culturally dynamic and heritage rich island. The list is really endless. Whether you’re traveling solo, as a couple, as a mixed group with boys and girls on the trip, it’s a wonderful escape from the bustling city life. The atmosphere is conducive for relaxation, throwing caution to the wind and just having fun! It can be a very budget friendly trip for low budget travelers, and on the other hand there are other luxurious beach areas for higher budget travelers. Zanzibar offers a delectable piece of the pie for everyone! 



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ARE YOU A **HOTEL, TOUR OR WILDERNESS CAMP OPERATOR** OFFERING DISTINCTIVE EXPERIENCES YOU WANT PROSPECTIVE GUESTS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT?

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