

# TRAVEL ESSENCE MAGAZINE

ISSUE 12 • SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2021

MEET THE CHEFS  
OF *Alkebulan*:  
AFRICAN CUISINE AT  
DUBAI EXPO 2020

CHISA BUSANGA  
AND GREEN SAFARI  
FOUNDATION  
CONSERVATION  
ETHOS IN ZAMBIA

DUBAI'S  
NEWEST  
ATTRACTION  
AIN DUBAI

*Back on the  
Zambezi*  
ON BOARD  
THE RA IKANE

# NINA OLATOKE

CREATING THE ALL AFRICA FESTIVAL AND PROMOTING  
THE SPIRIT OF AFRICA IN THE MIDDLE EAST



# KIZA



TOMORROW AFRICA

## A TASTE OF AFRICA'S FRUIT OF THE LAND

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*Take your African  
food journey with us....*

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Culture • Lifestyle • Taste-Making



# TravelEssence<sup>MAGAZINE</sup>

Culture • Lifestyle • Taste-Making







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“Africa — You can see a sunset and believe you have witnessed the Hand of God. You watch the slope lope of a lioness and forget to breathe. You marvel at the tripod of a giraffe bent to water. In Africa, there are iridescent blues on the wings of birds that you do not see anywhere else in nature. In Africa, in the midday heart, you can see blisters in the atmosphere. When you are in Africa, you feel primordial, rocked in the cradle of the world.

— JODI PICOULT

to walk through doors of opportunity, whether they are calling us to travel for leisure or head off into new markets for trade or employment opportunities. Wherever you and I find ourselves, may we be inspired by new possibilities, and the notion that every interaction is an opportunity to learn more about the similarities we share as humanity, rather than our differences.

In this Issue, journey with us as we share more of the hospitality gems in the UAE we have had the privilege of experiencing firsthand, before trekking across our beloved continent towards the south, where we'll explore the Zambezi River; catch up with conservation stalwarts and hear from members of our traveling family in their experiences in the Cape Winelands, across Rwanda and on a road trip across the UAE

We are incredibly grateful for your ongoing support and look forward to pulling up in your city soon! Don't forget to connect and share with us across our Travel Essence Magazine social media platforms! 

Your truly,

*Gywnne C. Mtengwa*

**E**nter the 4th Quarter of 2021, where everyone seemingly begins to chase time in anticipation of the year end. The 27th of September heralded the celebration of World Tourism Day, a day set aside to amplify awareness within the international community on what role tourism plays in propagating social, cultural, political, and economic value the world over.

For one of Africa's great tourism destinations South Africa, the 24th was a celebration of Heritage Day, where citizens of the rainbow nation remember the importance of cultural heritage especially in the context of a country that exhibits such diversity in a people, languages, and beliefs.

Cutting across the skies all the way to the UAE, where Travel Essence Magazine is domiciled, the gates to what is coined "The World's Greatest Show" – Dubai EXPO 2020, opened on the 30th of September – and oh what an inspirational spectacle that was, especially given that the United Arab Emirates is home to more than 200+ nationalities!

The underlying key messages in this season to us is really about celebrating diversity. Diversity and tolerance, appreciation of differences, and willingness to discover more of what awaits us beyond our comfort zones. It is about adapting to change; the changes that have come with accepting the fact that COVID-19 has changed us and is here to stay. And so, with this, we must allow ourselves





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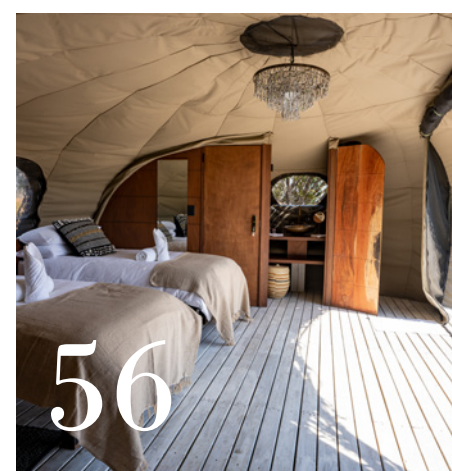
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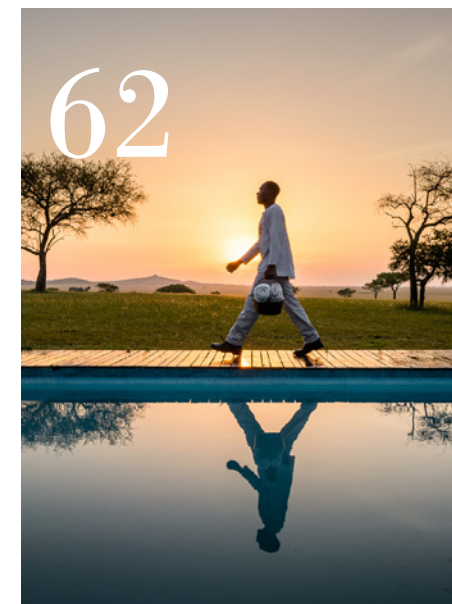
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# Nina Olatoke

## on promoting the spirit of Africa in the UAE

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The All Africa Festival (AFF), the largest showcase of pan-African cultures which seeks to bring together the region's residents and expats alike to experience the continent's vibrant energy, beauty, and diversity, is slated to make its return to Dubai in October 2021, in a spectacular 3-day extravaganza held on the grounds of Burj Park, Downtown Dubai. But this would not have been made possible without the creative prowess of Nina Olatoke, CEO and Co-Founder of AFF, who has since 2018, actively curated events that promote the spirit of Africa in what is arguably, one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world. We caught up with Nina to find out a little bit about herself and her journey to bringing the All Africa Festival to life.

### 1. NINA OLATOKE UNPACKED IN A FEW SENTENCES?

I am a woman of many layers and still on a journey of discovering them all. Be it in my role as Vice President HR EMEA & Global Vice President DEI for BDP International or as Co-Founder & CEO of AFF; I have discovered my passion fires as I call them. I am immensely grateful for the support of my organization (BDP International), my partners in AFF, pillars in the community and especially my life partner and family as I continue this journey of discovery.

### 2. TALK TO US ABOUT THE KEY CHILDHOOD MOMENTS THAT INSPIRED YOUR JOURNEY TO DATE.

If you ask my family, they will say that I was born to do this. Culture as a whole and the expression of it has always been part of my DNA. As I think of this question now, there are many. But a key one would be as part of the cultural group at school. From expressions of Culture from North, South, East or West of Nigeria, I was always a part of it.

### 3. YOU ARE NIGERIAN BORN, MOVED TO THE UK, AND HAVE SPENT YOUR LAST 5-6 YEARS IN THE UAE. HOW HAS YOUR QUEST FOR INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES SHAPED YOUR CAREER AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP PURSUITS IN RECENT YEARS?

I am a learner. Every day opens new experiences that, if you are open, allow you to question your beliefs and bias and, if you









are lucky, gain new perspectives that shape the future. AFF has been one of such experiences. Opening my mind to feedback and daring to see the possibilities in 2019 is what has led my partners and I to the 2021 event. This has been the path I have taken most of my life and has helped me grow personally and professionally.

**4. THIS OCTOBER, YOU ARE SLATED TO BRING BACK A REVAMPED VERSION OF THE ALL AFRICAN FOOD & CULTURE FESTIVAL (AFF) – NOW CALLED THE ALL AFRICA FESTIVAL, AN EVENT YOU HAVE RUN SINCE 2018? TALK TO US ABOUT WHAT THIS EVENT STANDS FOR, AND WHY PEOPLE SHOULD BE EXCITED TO SEE AND EXPERIENCE IT ON DUBAI'S YEAR-END CALENDAR OF EVENTS?**

The event is a first-of-its-kind African event with a distinct offering focused on the vibrant celebration of the African Culture in all its **UNIQUE** and **BEAUTIFUL** representations around the **WORLD**. Africa is not in a place; it is in the people's heart, minds, and souls. The event focuses on bringing this cultural experience to life through music, entertainment, fashion, art, and many other cultural expressions as we **EAT!** We aim to make you feel the rhythm of Africa through her many experiences. While there is **ONE** African Continent, there are **MANY** cultural expressions and experiences. It is the start of something big!

**5. WHAT INSPIRED THE CREATION OF THIS EVENT, AND TALK TO US ABOUT ITS EVOLUTION SINCE INCEPTION?**

Since inception and under a new strategic direction and team, the event is focused on not Africa the Map, but **HER** people and their expressions of Culture. We are thrilled to be bringing back AFF this year, an event first curated in 2018 with the desire to showcase Africa's vibrant food and entertainment experiences to a growing expat community in the UAE and the region. Having garnered significant traction over the years, we take on the challenge of curating an event of an even bigger magnitude, in partnership with Emaar, the masterplan developer. This year's edition marks a significant turning





point for us as an organization. As we bring to life the electric, vibrant energy for which Africa is known, we are also drawing together Africa's enthusiasts and lovers to an outdoor festival with guest safety and enjoyment at the core of our collective mandate.

**6. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE TOP HIGHLIGHTS YOU CAN SHARE FROM AN ENTERTAINMENT PERSPECTIVE?**

Together with our venue partner Emaar Properties PJSC, we will be hosting this landmark African community event. This premium event will showcase various aspects of Culture such as a unique nomadic dining experience in the setting of an African Village, an Art Gallery with carefully curated pieces including installations of world renowned artists such as El Anatsui, Margaret Otiemo and Isshaq Ismail and stage performance by local and international music acts like Diamond Platinumz and Rema, with a Vinyl Shack featuring rare classical records dating as

far back as 1959 of artistes such as ET Mensah, Nkono Teles and Fela Kuti. Besides top acts from the music industry, we will have theatrical performances, spoken word artists, live painting, dance, and a few others. And of course, we have not forgotten the little ones with a kids' area on site. With 3 days packed full of fun, this is an event not to be missed.

**7. A HUGE COMPONENT OF ANY CULTURE IS OF COURSE THE CULINARY EXPERIENCE. WHAT ARE YOU DOING DIFFERENTLY IN TERMS OF THE DINING EXPERIENCE IN THIS EDITION OF AFF?**

We have some key surprises for our guests. Our aim has always been to positively impact our community and I am delighted that as a result of AFF, the first African American registered Soul Food outlet was established and will be debuting at the event. We will also be bringing a variety of food options from across the continent and the



Culture in the Diaspora. We will also have the nomadic dining option in the African village, which should not be missed.

**8. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CULTURAL AND LIFESTYLE EXPERIENCES VISITORS TO THE EVENT CAN LOOK FORWARD TO AND WHAT ROLE DO YOU AIM FOR AFF TO PLAY IN FOSTERING THE OVERALL ATMOSPHERE IN ONE OF THE MOST CULTURALLY DIVERSE CITIES IN THE WORLD?**

As the continent of Africa continues to witness significant changes in recent history, with notable global attention on the continent's diversity and growth opportunities, AFF aims to contribute towards the ongoing quest to redraft its narrative, particularly within the region's arts, culture, and entertainment scene. To that end, we as the organisers of AFF are creating a platform for intercultural exchange and immersive interaction in a destination renowned for its hospitality, diversity, and connectedness.

This family-friendly event is being curated to attract diverse African and non-African cultural groups as well as inbound leisure and business tourists in an atmosphere of fun and energetic expression at Burj Park in Downtown Dubai. It will also offer exhibits and experiences interwoven to tell the story of Africa and all people with roots or affinity towards the continent.

**9. HAVING LIVED OUTSIDE AFRICA FOR A SIGNIFICANT PART OF YOUR LIFE, WHAT KEEPS YOU ROOTED IN YOUR PAN-AFRICANISM?**

The need to connect with the core of who I am and to ensure that I instil that in my family. I have seen how the disconnect from a sense of self and belonging can impact us all. I once believed that the less African







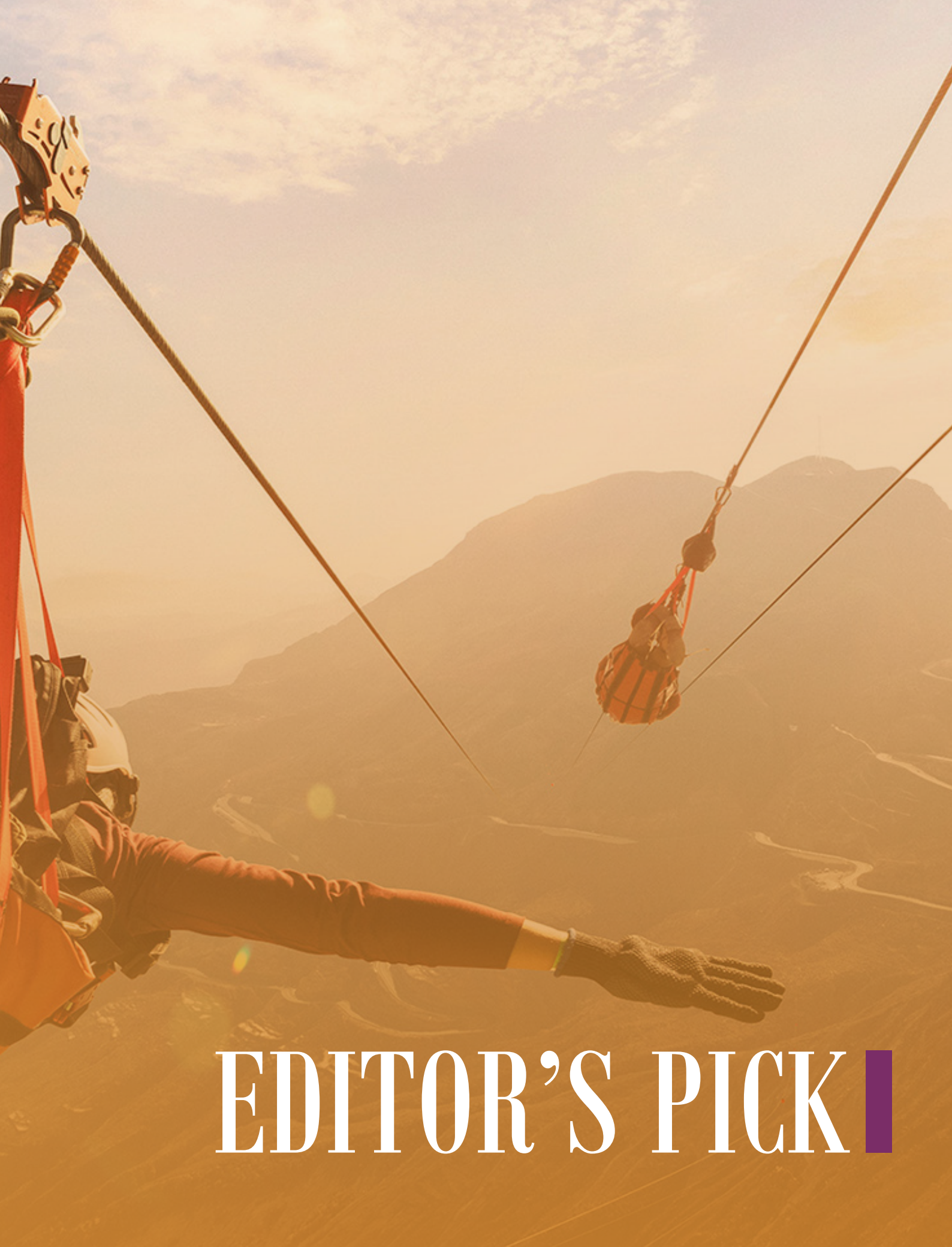
I appeared, the more successful I would be. I soon came to realise that it only slowed down the rate of growth to think this way. Dubai is such an amazing city in the way it encourages everyone to embrace where they come from and share their experience of culture. This led me to not only co-create AFF but also to share my experiences in a new collaborative book titled “Black and African guide to moving to the UAE”. My passion fire has been ignited to ensure that we share a holistic African story from all HER people.

### 10. WHERE DO YOU SEE THE ALL AFRICA FESTIVAL IN 5 YEARS?

That is a big question. The vision is endless. The Festival's main objective is to create an event where both Africans and non-Africans can experience the richness and diversity of Africa on the world stage in the UAE. We envision in the next five years for this event to be the number one event in the world when it comes to celebrating the African culture in its entirety; promoting the cultural diversity and inclusiveness of the city as we celebrate. This is only the beginning, and the best is yet to come. 🌍







EDITOR'S PICK |





# The Perfect Moms-and-Babes Staycation At Raffles Dubai

The luxury of space, the energy of Dubai, the beauty of Raffles. Not only close to Dubai's best-loved landmarks, Raffles Dubai is one of them, easily noticeable by its distinctive pyramid shape, which merges Asian style with an Egyptian aesthetic, and delivers the luxury of space, impeccable service and sophisticated style. Situated in the heart of the city, Raffles Dubai enjoys the perfect location just 10 minutes from Dubai International Airport and connected to Wafi Mall, one of Dubai's seemingly heritage lifestyle and entertainment complexes.

By Yvonne C Mtengwa

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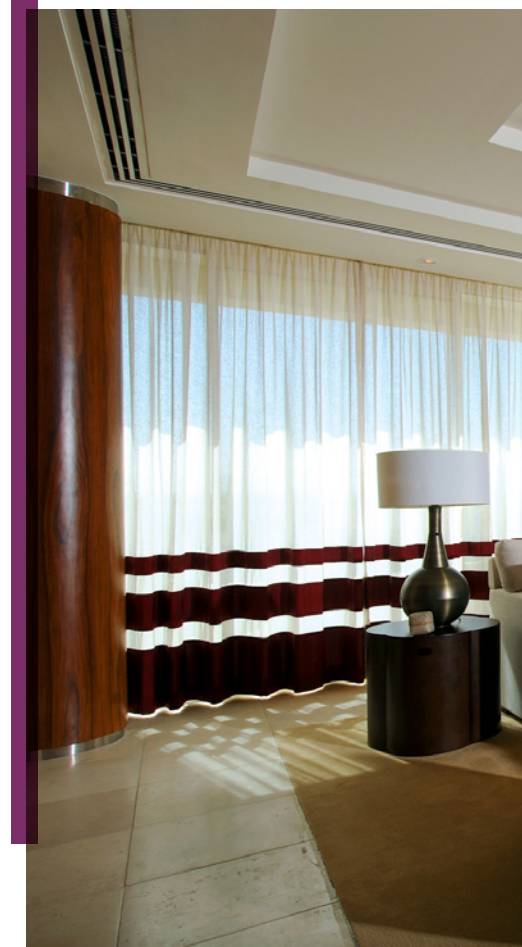
**I**nspired by one of my good friends who had recently enjoyed a stay at the hotel, I thought to take my little ones on what I was to coin a “Moms and Babes” staycation; except this time, I was bringing another family along for some much-needed mom time with our perennial luggage – our kids.

The Raffles Dubai team was incredibly gracious, offering us two luxury suites which would accommodate our group of 2 moms and 5 children under 13! Space is always a pre-requisite for me as a working mom on the move and given that our children’s ages ranged from 13 down to 4, it’s always imperative that each stay accommodates the needs of each child – whether its play areas for the youngest or connectivity for the savvy pre-teens.

A short drive from Dubai’s business districts and financial centre, Downtown Burj Khalifa and the Dubai Mall; the city’s major shopping, cultural and tourist attractions a few minutes away, we checked into Raffles Dubai for our weekend staycation, a property for which is renowned as an ideal sanctuary for leisure and business travellers. We were close to enough to any part of the city should we opt to venture out, but the goal for this was pure relaxation – and giving the children stories to write about when they headed back to school at the end of the holidays.

#### A STAY AT RAFFLES DUBAI

With an incredible sense of space, legendary service and unforgettable style, Raffles Dubai often curates attractive offers for the whole family across all seasons, each provided with the utmost care and comfort.







Check in was a breeze, and we were soon led to our suites to begin our summer weekend escape as part of our Raffles' family staycation in the charming settings of Dubai's iconic pyramid-shaped hotel. Our suites awarded us stunning vistas of the city, boasting a private balcony with phenomenal views of Dubai's skyline. With complimentary extra beds set in the huge living room, the set up felt very much like a luxurious sleep over, much to the delight of the little ones. Moms had their private Master bedrooms, a fitting retreat from the playful noise that characterizes any trip with a group of children.

#### BOTTOMLESS TREATS AT RAFFLES DUBAI

A highlight during our stay was the ever-delightful afternoon tea in the Raffles Salon, located on the far end of the majestic lobby area. Coined the "Floral Afternoon Tea", we partook of this opportunity to enjoy a spectacular selection of savoury treats and sweet temptations, themed to invoke the essence of flowers in their bloom, and elegantly presented in Victorian styled gold stands that play host to Forever Rose's signature Bella Rose.

Huddled around our tables holding the decadent the array of canapes, sandwiches, cupcakes, sliders and more, the Floral Afternoon Tea presented a fun twist to lunch, with so many options to choose from, accompanied by juices, milkshakes, and coffees where preferred. To all moms looking to take their children out for something a little extra – the afternoon tea is available daily at Raffles Salon from 2pm to 7pm – and is an experience you will long remember.

#### SUN AND SPLASH AT RAFFLES POOL

I really looked forward to an afternoon where I could luxuriate in the cool waters of the Raffles outdoor swimming pool on the 4th floor. With a dynamic view of the pyramid architecture to one side, and the sparkling water features that cascade into the main pool, with multiple smaller yet shallower pools for the little ones, pool day was a win as we enjoyed light snacks and refreshing drinks served from the pool bar.

No stay at Raffles Dubai would ever be





## EDITOR'S PICK • RAFFLES DUBAI


complete without a pool day, and access isn't limited to hotel guests either. For a little under AED200 per person on weekdays, including AED100 that can be used for food and drinks and complimentary access for one child up to 12 years per adult, visitors to the hotel can enjoy a poolside afternoon should they not be staying in house. The pool pass is also available, with its cost partially redeemable on food and drinks, and a nominal charge for children between 6 to 12. The pass is complimentary for children below 6 years.

### REJUVENATE AT RAFFLES SPA

Spa enthusiasts are invited to try Raffles Spa at Raffles Dubai, which also offers Spa-cation experiences where guests can enjoy a day of pampering and dining with a pool side add-on on appointment. From aromatherapy massages using essential oils to reduce stress and fatigue while boosting the immune system, to deep cleansing facials customised for all skin types, one can enjoy a treatment that includes a regime of exfoliation,

a massage to increase blood circulation and application of a nourishing mask that cleans and purifies the face, making it soft and smooth.

### EXPERIENCE A HERITAGE BRAND IN THE HEART OF DUBAI

Raffles Hotels & Resorts boasts an illustrious history and some of the most prestigious hotel addresses worldwide. In 1887, Raffles Singapore set the standard for luxury hospitality, introducing the world to private butlers, the Singapore Sling and its enduring, legendary service. Today, Raffles continues this tradition in leading cities and lavish resort locales, enchanting travellers with meaningful experiences and service that is both gracious and intuitive. Connoisseurs of life choose Raffles, not merely for its aura of culture, beauty, and gentility, but for the extraordinary way they feel when in residence with Raffles. Each Raffles, be it Paris, Istanbul, Warsaw, Jakarta, the Seychelles, or Dubai, serves as a venerated oasis where travellers arrive as guests, leave as friends, and return as family. 









# Fuss-Free Beachfront Hospitality at *Rove La Mer Beach*

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Opening its doors in Q4 of 2020 and located on the sandy beaches of Dubai's landmark La Mer lifestyle destination in Jumeirah, Rove La Mer Beach offers a spectacular mash-up between fuss-free hospitality and access to a plethora of leisure and lifestyle brands within a mere stone-throw away from the hotel.







### *Brand Ethos*

Rove Hotels is an award-winning Dubai-born lifestyle hotel brand, offering well designed hotels in connected locations. Designed for the traveller who likes to explore without borders, receive fuss-free service and some touches of local culture, Rove Hotels defines a new niche in the ever-evolving global hospitality sector.

In a city that boasts countless options in hospitality brands, Rove Hotels has managed to carve out its niche, positioning the brand as a beacon for reliable, modern, and efficient service. Regardless of their location, guests (called Rovers) will always find locally inspired modern interiors, relaxed service and all the essentials to enjoy their stay.

### *Sun and sand at Rove La Mer Beach*

Surf meets the city at Rove La Mer Beach as Rovers are awarded the perfect excuse to soak in the sun, sand, and pristine waters, explore trendy restaurants along the colourful boardwalk, and take off on an unforgettable urban adventure from one of Dubai's most historic and best-loved neighbourhoods, Jumeirah.

The product speaks to upwardly mobile, modern travellers with a knack for diverse experiences that are characterised by fun, affordability, and accessibility. The buzzword is "cool". A stay at Rove La Mer Beach is cool, and almost reminiscent of one at a small boutique hotel on the shores of Miami's South Beach. An idyllic escape to the destination promises a creatively inspired, comfortable stay, with Rove La Mer Beach offering a choice of two Rover Room types: one with amazing skyline views, and the other with sea views. Each room is fully equipped with all the

essentials, plus a Juliet balcony from which to admire breath-taking views of the city and the sea. For those who want to bring along the whole gang, there are plenty of interconnecting Rover Rooms as well.

There are some things Rovers can't do without, but don't worry, Rove La Mer Beach's got you covered. From funky design interiors, direct access to La Mer Beach, water sport activities, access to plentiful dining and entertainment options in the hotel and around the neighbourhood, and outdoor swimming pool and sundeck fully embellished with quirky spoils like ice-cream and frozen yoghurt carts, Rove La Mer Beach delivers on a stay that will leave you speaking on it for a time after checking out.

### *Dubai's Eclectic Beachfront, right at the Doorstep*

Featuring a waterpark, inflatable playgrounds, boutique stores and over 50












gourmet restaurants and lounges, Rove La Mer Beach is located on more than just a beachfront. La Mer is one of Dubai's most exciting outdoor destinations, offering plenty of activities to delight solo adventurers and families alike. Rovers can look forward to a world of options and attractions, including Laguna Waterpark and Roxy Cinemas, along a wide selection of boutique, concept and department stores, water sports such as jet skiing and kayaking, outdoor gym equipment and a volleyball court, and games like foosball and ping pong.

### *Relaxed Beachside Experiences*

Rove La Mer Beach features a variety of food and beverage options for Rovers to enjoy both indoor and outdoor at the hotel terrace, overlooking the beach. The hotel is the ideal beachside chill-out spot for relaxing over great food, great drinks, and great conversation, out in the open air. From refreshing bevies at the Drink Truck and vibrant music and drinks at the Beach Bar, to all-day dining at The Daily – there's something for every mood at Rove La Mer Beach.

Rove La Mer Beach is also a great spot for those freelancing or working remotely. The hotel has working spots, as well as Dubai's first-ever co-working space on the beach inclusive of dedicated seating. Launched in collaboration with Letswork, members can now enjoy these workspaces as well as numerous perks at Rove La Mer Beach and all Rove locations.

La Mer has plenty to discover. For those who love an adventure, why not explore the sandy white beaches that stretch on for miles, or venture further by foot, and discover Jumeirah's historic roots and ever-evolving landscape? Stay a day or more, whether arriving solo, with a friend, or as a family, and dive into beachfront leisure with all the fun and none of the fuss. 





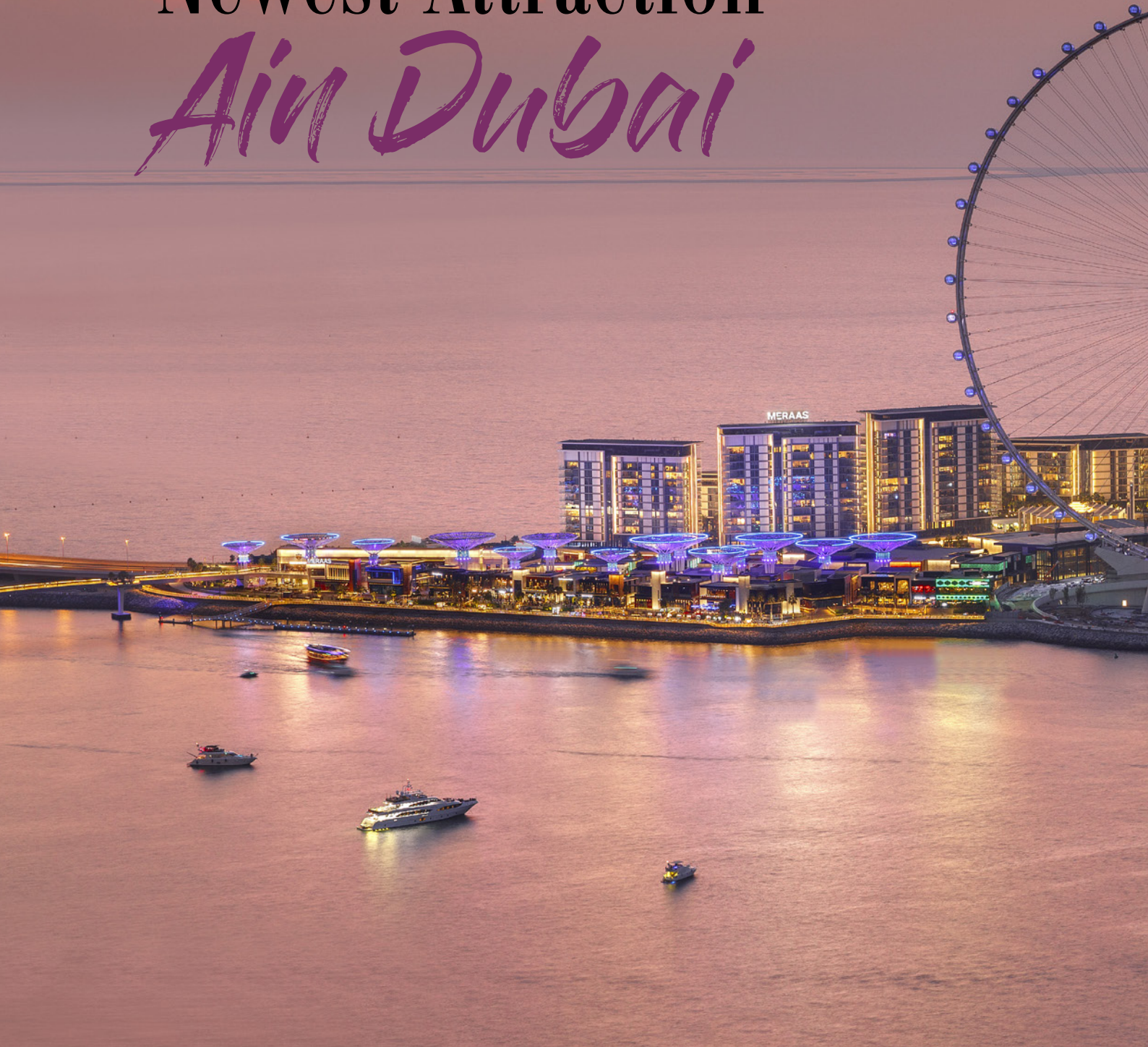


For more information, please visit  
[www.rovehotels.com](http://www.rovehotels.com)





# A Snapshot Of Dubai's Newest Attraction *Ain Dubai*





A photograph of the Ain Dubai observation wheel at sunset. The wheel is partially visible on the left side of the frame, with its white structure and blue-lit cabins. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple, with some clouds. In the foreground, the calm water of the sea reflects the colors of the sky. In the middle ground, a large, modern building complex is illuminated with warm yellow lights, situated on a small island or peninsula. The overall scene is serene and captures a beautiful moment in Dubai.

The world's largest and tallest observation wheel will offer over 19 customisable experiences for guests to enjoy. Ain Dubai is the world's largest and tallest observation wheel, standing at over 250 metres. The record-breaking monument offers unrivalled and unforgettable social and celebratory experiences as well as 360-degree views of Dubai in premium comfort – all at heart of Bluewaters, the sophisticated, must-visit island destination. The 48 passenger cabins that circle the enormous circumference of the wheel have capacity to carry more than 1,750 visitors at once.





Ain Dubai ticket prices can be purchased on [www.aindubai.com](http://www.aindubai.com).

A

in Dubai is the latest addition to the extensive Dubai Holding entertainment portfolio and plays a strategic role in supporting Dubai's long-term vision as set by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to

strengthen its global position as a key tourism hub, continuing to build on the emirate's reputation as a leader in the global leisure and entertainment landscape.


From sundowners, dining in the sky and exclusive celebration packages to bespoke corporate and event offerings, Ain Dubai brings 19 truly unique and customisable experiences, all against the backdrop of Dubai's dazzling skyline for breathtaking land and seascapes. Open both day and night, Ain Dubai visitors will experience two very different sides of Dubai from stunning Bluewaters views to a host of night-time entertainment. Gaze at the sunset's golden rays glittering across the skyscrapers or watch Dubai's spectacular LED lights switch on as darkness falls.

Offering unique views of Dubai's iconic landmarks from indoor, air-conditioned cabins and a huge range of entertainment to keep visitors coming back for more, the experiences are split into three main categories: Observation Cabins, Social Cabins and Private Cabins, with experiences starting with one rotation of approximately 38 minutes, up to two rotations of approximately 76 minutes.

The **Observation Cabins** provide the perfect platform for those never-seen-before Instagrammable 360-degree views of Dubai as guests climb steadily through the sky on the world's tallest observation wheel to create a magical photobook memory of one of the world's most iconic cities and all its incredible landmarks.

Experience a uniquely fun way to relax into the end of a busy day or start an incredible night out, with the **Social Cabins** which feature beverage-inclusive packages that offer something for everyone. Step into a premium cabin for the VIP treatment or get the best social vibes at the Ain Dubai Sky Bar cabins with beverages to toast the sunset over Dubai.

Visitors can reach new heights with an Ain Dubai **Private Cabin** providing exclusivity. Discover unique celebration packages for birthdays, engagements, weddings, business functions and more. The private cabins can be customised to cater for all sorts of events, from intimate celebrations to cultural festivities to treat VIP guests.

The magnificent Ain Dubai sits at the heart of the unique, must-visit lifestyle destination, Bluewaters, where the charm and exclusivity of island living meets the exuberance of a sophisticated urban lifestyle. Bluewaters boasts hospitality, lifestyle, residential, and leisure and entertainment opportunities. 





# TASTE-MAKERS |



A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a bright blue long-sleeved dress with a colorful floral and geometric pattern, stands in a modern architectural hallway. The hallway features a wooden slat ceiling and large glass walls that reflect the surrounding environment. She is wearing grey high-heeled sandals. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

*Meet*

HOSPITALITY PR  
MAVEN  
MOUNA OUNI



# From humble upbringings in Tunisia to growth in the UAE

## 1. MOUNA OUNI - WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU WELL SAY ABOUT YOU? TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR UPBRINGING, LOVES AND INTERESTS?

People who are dear to me would describe me as someone who does not know how to express her love through words but in action. I am a 'driver' who likes to motivate people. Sharing positive vibes and energy is my thing. Marketing, hospitality, and media relations are what piques my interest. I keep my curiosity open and explore things related to my passion.

Deeply inspired by my primary school teacher who exuded intelligence, a great communicator, and a left-handed writer, I thought to myself that I wanted to become like her, so I studied hard in school. But I hated Math (I think this is common for people who are Marketing & Communications professionals) and pursued a degree in Communications instead.

## 2. HOW WAS LIFE FOR YOU GROWING UP IN TUNISIA, AND SHARE WITH US A SNAPSHOT OF YOUR JOURNEY TO EVENTUALLY RELOCATING TO THE UAE?

Born and raised in the beautiful city of Sousse, the center of my lovely Tunisia, I am a proud North African who grew up under the care of my grandparents, and most especially my grandmother who taught me how to be independent at an early age. My parents liked to spoil me and were overprotective of me maybe because it took them 7 years to conceive their eldest daughter. My mother usually cried whenever she saw me cooking and cleaning at the age of 6 as per her, she did not want me to be raised this way. To be honest, I actually enjoyed that chapter of my life because I learned a lot of practical things that I am applying now as a mother and of course, I was in it for the reward! My grandmother always gave me sweets when I finished a task!

Tunisia is a vibrant country influenced by European culture; specifically, the French and Sousse is a city with a rich

cultural heritage, surrounded by enormous, beautiful beaches, hotels, and night clubs. Truly, it is like the Dubai of Tunisia. Having lived on this side of the world has helped me adapt to the fast-paced life in Dubai easily as they have a lot of things in common when it comes to being open to the world.

During my teenage years when I was preparing for University, I chose to live in Tunis because I wanted to discover this big city and achieve my goal to become a journalist. I knew I would have higher chances for opportunities there.

Indeed, Tunis presented me with a lot and I became a TV presenter. One of the highlights of my journey as a TV presenter was in 2002, where I was invited by ART Head Office in Italy to do the coverage of the World Cup Korea / Japan team.

Without a doubt, I flew to Italy, knowing only a handful of Italian words and most of them were the basics. This moment made me realize that nothing can and will stop me.

I had a lovely experience and made connections with different nationalities who work in the same field. Unfortunately, my dreams of living and working in Italy ended abruptly when the owner of the company decided to close the head office. I had to go back to Tunis with no plans at all. It was devastating news because I was hoping to re-join TUNIS 7 or find another suitable job in the same industry. I shared my CV with a lot of companies, and they all rejected me citing that my experience was only for TV and that they couldn't hire me. It was a shame and I felt down and stressed.

I started doing deep cleaning at my parent's house and cooking for the family to cope with the stress of my new norm, up until one day, our neighbour was passing by and saw me cleaning. He said he couldn't believe what he was seeing. I can still remember what he said "Oh my God, Mouna Ouni from TV celebrity to a house maid?! He laughed.

This gentleman who laughing at me and made me feel ashamed, is who I credit as the catalyst for moving to the UAE. He was to become the man to open the door for me to the Middle East as he introduced me to my first employer in Abu Dhabi.





### 3. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO VENTURE INTO THE WORLD OF PR IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

My career started as a TV Presenter and eventually moved to Public Relations when I relocated to Dubai in 2002. Ending up in the hospitality industry is something I never expected but I believe that I am where I am because of God.

Having studied Mass Communications, theoretically I knew the Public Relations job, but I wanted to practice it. And in case things didn't go well in Dubai, this was my backup plan. I had it stuck in my mind that if I can work for hotels here and gain enough experience, I can go back to Tunisia and apply for a job in the same field.

I received a reply from a popular hotel chain in Middle East saying that they were interested on having me on board. So, I gave it a try and I loved every bit of it! From writing press

releases, organizing events, building connections, being the voice and image of your brand and more, I was enjoying the #PRLife combined with #HotelierLife.

### 4. WHAT OPPORTUNITIES HAVE BEEN PIVOTAL IN YOUR GROWTH NOT ONLY AS A PR PROFESSIONAL, BUT WORKING IN A DESTINATION THAT IS RENOWNED FOR HOSTING THE BIGGEST BRANDS IN THE BUSINESS OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM?

All opportunities presented to me in my career were incomparable but the one that I am most grateful for is having recruited by Starwood, specifically Sheraton, as it was considered the school of hospitality.

Starwood sent me to Egypt for leadership trainings such as Six Sigma, a training wherein I was taught how to improve the process and method of hospitality. They equipped me with all the knowledge I need to be a Director of PR. I was given a huge responsibility with almost impossible KPIs and with perseverance and hard work, I was able to exceed their expectation.

My General Manager that time saw huge potential in me and involved me in the operations of the hotel. For that experience I am still grateful to this day.

### 5. WHAT LESSONS HAVE YOU LEARNED LIVING IN THE MIDDLE EAST THAT HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY, YOU WOULD TAKE BACK TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY OF TUNISIA?

As we all know, UAE is a country where expats come to live and work. It is a home 200+ nationalities with different cultures, beliefs, perspectives, opinions, ways of living and so on.

The first thing I learned is to keep an open mind and be respectful to anyone regardless of their nationality. I told myself that I will try to learn something from any person that I will encounter to help me build a connection with them.

Back home, we didn't have that many expats, so it was truly a challenge for me, but it is one of the most fulfilling experiences in my life here in Dubai – meeting people from different places who all come with unique experiences.



**6. YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT FOSTERING AND WITNESSING GROWTH AND WELLNESS IN WOMEN. TALK TO US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT THE TERM "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT" MEANS TO YOU?**

I believe that women are already empowered beings ever since the beginning. It's just a matter of supporting each other by boosting one's confidence, challenging them to get out of their comfort zone, and helping each other discover our truest potential.

**7. YOU RECENTLY LAUNCHED A NEW PODCAST AND ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN A RANGE OF INITIATIVES THAT SUPPORT WOMEN. DO TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR PODCAST, AND SOME OF THE LESSONS YOU ARE TAKING AWAY AS YOU EVOLVE IN THIS SPACE?**

Your Life Story podcast aims to inspire its listeners by discovering untold stories about our guests' personal lives, career moves, marketing, PR, mental health, growth, successes, and failures from people all over the world.

It is something that my friends have been pushing me to do but kept on postponing it. This went on until on my birthday, a colleague gifted me with the most basic recording device. I told myself that I have no excuses now! I had to START.

This lesson is applicable to everyone – start somewhere. Start small. Just start, give it your all and everything else will follow.

**8. "MOUNA ON INSPIRATION" - WHAT 3 THINGS INSPIRE YOU THAT YOU BELIEVE HELP PEOPLE AND MOST IMPORTANTLY WOMEN - LIVE BETTER LIVES?**

Family most especially my daughter, having gratitude through everything and maintaining a positive mindset.



**9. "MOUNA THE COMMUNICATOR" - NAME 3 THINGS EVERY WOMAN ON THE PATHWAY TO GROWTH MUST ALWAYS DO TO BUILD BETTER RELATIONSHIPS IN THEIR FIELD OF EXPERTISE?**

I'd say take the initiative and approach everything with a smile, be consistent in everything you do and extend genuine feelings to gain the trust of others. Lastly, I'll add that it's important that we keep in mind that nothing is impossible, and everything has a solution.

**10. "MOUNA THE TRAVELLER" - WHICH ARE YOUR TOP TRAVEL DESTINATIONS IN AFRICA AND WHY?**


I have always been fascinated with the wildlife safari and I know South Africa is well known for these experiences. Kenya is also top on my list because of its beautiful beaches.

**11. WHAT LEGACY WOULD YOU LIKE TO BUILD THAT WOMEN IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY LOCALLY, REGIONALLY, AND BEYOND CAN EMULATE OR TAP INTO FROM YOU?**

Before when I was asked about legacy, the first thing that came to my mind was my professional achievements, the awards that I received, the connections I made with highly influential people. My thoughts were largely focused on me.

But today when I really think about "legacy" I believe it is something you impart on other people. I am described by the colleagues that I closely worked with as someone who has a very strong personality but a big heart as well. I give my team a hard time in a sense that I push them to their limits. I support their growth and empower them with huge responsibilities. I am proud to say that everyone who worked with me has become successful in their own career paths. I'd like my legacy to be tied to my ability to make a difference in the lives of others by challenging them to become the best versions of themselves.

**12. WHAT DO YOU ENVISION FOR YOUR LIFE IN SAY, THE NEXT 5 YEARS?**

I see a picture of me as a General Manager running a lifestyle hotel with 100% female employees coming from diverse nationalities. This hotel will be a haven for women where they can freely express herself. I look forward to witnessing this dream manifest! 







# Africa is still beckoning

It has become clear that it will still be some time before the whole world can safely proclaim the 18 months or so of the economically devastating Coronavirus a thing of the past. We should not discourage the laudable optimism of those who began months ago, even back in 2020, to talk of a post Covid-19 world and pretend as if we're already there, as that is the best way that they, and all of us, can shed the pains of the past 18 months and start shaping a world where Covid-19 would be a thing of the past, belonging to history books. Starting by imagining ourselves in it is therefore not such a bad thing.

By Solly Moeng

**B**

ut we're not quite there yet, as this global pandemic seems to be having fun at our collective expense as it keeps returning in dribs and drabs in the form of new strains, taking more lives and causing the destruction of more livelihoods in its path. Some countries are

already talking about additional, "booster", vaccination for those who are already vaccinated, just be sure that the protection they have is strengthened.

## *Africa cannot wait*

But Africa – and our travel and tourism sector - cannot simply sit still and wait for her fortunes to be determined solely by the vicissitudes of the Coronavirus, Covid-19 or the global pandemic, whatever name one chooses to refer to it by. While more care has to



be integrated into health and safety protocols that get put in place from the departure to arrival and throughout the entire stay in the traveller's tourist destination, and all the way back to where they would have begun their travel, the Coronavirus should no longer be a sufficient reason for people to hold off to their travel plans – provided they have been fully vaccinated or are proactively getting tested to ensure they aren't infected as they move from one place to the next.

In a sense, we already have a sense of what the post Covid-19 Africa will be like. It will not be that much different from the rest of the world in as far as new health and safety protocols are concerned, as they will have to be globally uniform, but nothing could ever replace a physical experience of travel to Africa. There was a point at which the virtual world we have been forced to live and operate in over the past 18 months became too uniform, giving some the false impression that they no longer needed to 'be there' in person and to taste the food, partake in the dances and other cultural experiences, or enjoy a dawn or dusk game drive in the African Savanna. Those who are already caught up in this kind of thinking are mistaken, of course, and need to be reminded of an African world. Only Africa can remind them.

The work of those who make a living out of the pleasure of marketing African destinations is, more than ever before, well cut out for them. Apart from assuring potential travellers about the safety measures in place to protect them, they must also be true, convincing story tellers, and master the ability to move people from the false trappings of virtual tours – which have been good for keeping the dream alive - to inspiring them to develop the appetite again to travel in person. Luckily, humans are social animals. Their desire to be in the same space with others will not be forever killed by the Coronavirus. It just needs the right kind of stimulus to rejuvenate it.

### *What travel to and within Africa now looks like for some*

People who have already travelled to Africa will agree that the mere idea of returning is sufficient stimulus to reawaken the desire to experience Africa again as the whole word emerges from many months of Covid-19 induced movement restricting lockdowns. But Africa will not be alone in trying to entice foreign tourists to come and experience its unique, diverse, offerings. The hunger for more local and international tourists is, more than ever before, a global phenomenon as many economies that rely on proceeds from tourism place their offerings on the global market with packages that many will find hard to resist.

Competition will be stiff, not because African experiences can now be had through virtual tours or at recreated, artificial, theme parks in some parts of the world, but because potential tourists who are still comfortable with long-haul travel will also be a lot more discerning. They will be mindful of health and


safety, in the first place, and of costs. The destinations that offer them peace of mind, in terms of healthy safety measures, and well-priced packages to entice them to travel, will win their patronage. Nothing can replace in person travel to any destination that offers an irreplaceable confluence of body and mind experience offered by African destinations, whether such experience gives one a sense of having returned home - for many who, directly or products of several generations, are long established in the diaspora – and for those who can only feel an authentic connection with nature through an African travel experience.

### *What has to change*

While Africa remains a large continent of 54 countries, one disputed territory and two dependencies, La Reunion and Mayotte, which are considered to be overseas departments of France, there remains a missed opportunity to create a continental structure for the general promotion of tourism to and around the continent. Such a structure would not replace existing national tourism bodies. Its work would complement and be complemented by the work they do in attracting tourists to the countries they represent.

For such a structure to function, different African countries would contribute a stipulated percentage of their tourism and investment promotion budget - 1% - 3% (depending on the size of their respective economies) to the continental initiative whose team of professional marketers would come from across the continent. Its campaigns would not be focussed on any one particular country but required to integrate and showcase the best leisure and business tourism products from across the continent.

At a broad level, African travel experiences do not stand against one another, but they have been presented as such for far too long. Instead, they should be presented and marketed to complement one another. The task is up to smart marketers to create seamless narratives that will ensure that visitors to the continent stay longer, spend more, learn more, experience more, and are always made to leave with the hunger to keep returning in order to complete their story. Visiting Africa should be like reading a good book whose every chapter does not stand apart from all the other chapters but is linked to them in a manner that enables the visitor to experience the continent like one experiences a jigsaw puzzle of unforgettable anecdotes and lifelong, enriching, experiences.

As the world gradually emerges from 18 months of endless battles against the Coronavirus, something will have to change in the way Africa is presented to the world. It remains to be seen whether those tasked with marketing African destinations will open their eyes to the vast opportunities and benefits that can come with the kind of marketing innovation that will ensure that travel to Africa remains at the top of the bucket lists of countless potential travellers from across the globe. 





CULINARY  
ESCAPADES





# Meet the chefs

## who are bringing imaginative cuisines to Expo 2020 Dubai's African dining hall Alkebulan

For six months from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022, Africa has a global stage like it has never enjoyed before – a platform to showcase its potential to change the future, not just of Africa, but of the world. Expo 2020 Dubai is an unmissable opportunity to respond to how our world has altered – a launch pad for 191 countries to share their desire for positive change, to broaden their horizons and exchange ideas that inspire action to tackle real-life challenges.



**A**nd Africa must play a leading, active role. Showcasing African food and culture to Expo 2020 at dining hall Alkebulan, a phenomenal group of chefs have turned their vision into reality to blaze a trail for the continent's cuisine, so guests to the region's biggest event of the year can embark on unique culinary excursions across the continent Africa, with thanks to these great chefs with a passion for Africa's flavours.

Alkebulan (pronounced al-kee-boulan) – deemed the oldest name for Africa and translating to 'Mother of Mankind' or 'Garden of Eden' – is a culinary concept curated by award-winning chef Alexander Smalls, a classically trained opera singer-turned-restaurantier. The dining hall is a celebration of African cuisine, designed as a showcase of contemporary African food and music from across the continent. Each counter and concept has its own unique design that honours the individuality of the region, cuisine and chef.



## *Chefs of Alkebulan*



### **ALEXANDER SMALLS, CURATOR, ALKEBULAN**

A self-described ‘social minister’, Alexander Smalls is a James Beard Award winning chef, author, and raconteur and was the visionary co-owner of renowned restaurants, The Cecil and Minton’s. His award-winning restaurant, The Cecil, New York City’s first Afro-Asian-American restaurant, was named “Best New Restaurant in America” by Esquire in 2014. Throughout his career, he has been named one of Zagat’s “19 NYC Restaurant Power Players You Need to Know”.

As well as authoring acclaimed memoir and cookbook *Grace the Table*, Smalls’ creative talents as an opera singer have seen him receive both a Grammy Award and Tony Award for the cast recording of *Porgy and Bess*, by George Gershwin, with the Houston Grand Opera.

### **COCO REINARHZ**

Pan-African Coco is advancing the culinary renaissance that is modern African cuisine. A multi-award-winning chef, his contemporary take on traditional dishes from across the continent has attracted foodies from around the world to his restaurant, Epicure, in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Coco’s journey into the culinary world started many years ago thanks to his Belgian grandfather, a fellow chef. Spending his childhood at his mother’s side in her restaurant in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, he received his formal training at the Ecole Hotelière de la Province de Namur in Belgium.



### **MAME SOW**

Drawing her inspiration from seasonal, local ingredients, spices and colours, Mame Sow is a pastry chef celebrated for her juxtaposition of sweet and savoury flavours and her love of architecture. Her favourite ingredient to work with is chocolate, and through her creations, she aims to show the immense diversity of African flavours in her desserts. She has also ranked on New York City’s lists of Best Pastry Chefs, and was the pastry chef at Cecil/Minton’s when it was named best new restaurant in the country by Esquire Magazine.

Born and raised in Dakar, Senegal, Sow spent her adolescence in New York, where she discovered her love for food. She was granted a scholarship at the city’s esteemed International Culinary Center, and her talents were subsequently cultivated by internationally acclaimed restaurateur José Andrés at his restaurant, The Bazaar. She was also the Culinary Director at Zaha Hadid’s One Thousand Museum, one of the most high-end residential towers in Miami.







### KIRAN JETHWA

Born and raised in Kenya to an Indian father and English mother, Kiran Jethwa is widely recognised as East Africa’s first international celebrity chef.

Having fronted multiple shows for a variety of broadcasters across the world, his TV programmes have been viewed in more than 180 countries. Jethwa’s style has been described as “Bear Grylls meets Jamie Oliver” reflecting his passion for the outdoors and desire to source ingredients himself, coupled with his culinary flare and creativity. Jethwa was selected as one of the judges on the reality series *The Great Kenyan Bake Off* in 2019.



### GLORY KABE

Glory Gabe is a French-Congolese plant-based chef who creates flavourful and appetising vegan dishes with a nod to her African heritage. Before moving to London, Kabe was based in Paris at *La Mano Tortilleria*, vegan bistro *Abattoir Végétal* and French restaurant *Les Papilles*. Her cuisine is an appealing mix of traditions, blending old and new techniques to channel products of the African soil.



### PIERRE SIEWE

Pierre Siewe is a Cameroonian/French chef and original member of the widely recognised Parisian ‘Bistronomy’ Movement – a combination of bistro foods and dishes with gastronomic cooking methods – that changed the French food scene in the 1990s. Trained at *The Savoy* in London, Siewe is the now Head Chef and owner of the *Garde Temps* restaurant in Paris, and known for his creativity and dishes, which are traditionally African, using French techniques.



### MOOS GBANE

Chef Gbane is a classically trained chef from the prestigious *Le Cordon Bleu* school in France. A pastry chef, he has worked under MasterChef Joel Robuchon and at luxurious London hotels *The Savoy*, *The Ritz*, *The Connaught* and *The Langham*. In 2019, Gbane was a quarter-finalist in *Bake Off: The Professionals*. He now offers low sugar plant based fine pastry celebrating African product and flavours.



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### KELVIN THAIYA THAIRU

Kelvin Thaiya Thairu, is an award-winning bartender from Nairobi, Kenya. Passionate about elevating the cocktail culture in Nairobi and across the country, Kelvin trains emerging talent - the next generation of Kenyan bartenders.

### RICHIE BARROW

A seasoned food and beverage operator, Richie was born and raised in Kenya to an Irish father and Kenyan mother. Starting his career in the kitchen and bar, Richie brings his 15 years of hospitality experience to Tribe Hotels Group as the Food and Beverage General Manager.

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### *Unveiling Alkebulan*

Offering a delicious odyssey of flavours and experiences, Alkebulan will give diners the chance to experience gourmet dishes, street bites and fusion fare, all in one destination. The food hall hosts 10 counters, with each providing a different menu:

- **Afro Street Eatery**, by Coco, delivers rich aromatic flavours of West African street food, with

dishes such as Ugandan-style miniature chapatti wrap filled with beef or vegetable curry

- **Bar Cane**, also by Coco, satisfies sweet cravings, serving what could well be the world's finest doughnuts, washed down with dessert cocktails

- **Chicken Coop**, by Alexander Smalls, celebrates the humble chicken in two of its best forms: rotisserie and fried. The triple-fried Tunisian baharat chicken, paired with a thick, custardy Belgian



## CULINARY ESCAPADES • CHEFS OF ALKEBULAN

waffle, is not to be missed

- **Choma BBQ**, another Coco creation, is inspired by the art of roasting, grilling and smoking meats, with a menu that includes the not-to-be-missed Zanzibari spiced rice and lamb, served with kachumbari salad, as well as Kenyan style beef skewers served with roasted green bananas
- **Jiko Cocktails**, by Tribe Hotel Kenya, brings the flavours and spirits of Africa together through shaken, stirred, muddled and strained cocktails created by talented bartender Kelvin Thaiya.

- **Penja**, by award-winning pop-up chefs Pierre Siewe, Glory Kabe and Moos Gbane, promises innovative African cuisine and a world-class culinary experience from Cameroon and Benin, featuring dishes such as farm cockerel breaded with mustard and tapioca, tandoori vegetal mayonnaise fermented cassava semolina







# NARRATIVES

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At Narratives PR, we are committed to helping African owned corporate, consumer and personal brands connect with their audiences across the continent! We are all about curated storytelling for impact and awareness of your brand in Africa and the Middle East.

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## CULINARY ESCAPADES • CHEFS OF ALKEBULAN

- **Seven Seafood**, by trailblazing chef Kiran Jethwa, offers a contemporary look at East African seafood using ingredients, flavours and combinations from the region to take traditional cuisine Kenyan Cuisine into the modern world
- **Shoebox Bakery**, by Mame Sow, offers the ultimate pan-African bakery experience, spanning both sweet and savoury items, including Ethiopian injera flat bread
- **Sweet Ophelia's**, also by Smalls, is an Afro-Asian wok bar that serves tasty rice, noodle and dumpling dishes, including West African favourite Cameroonian pepper fish
- **The Tasty Goat**, from Jethwa, showcases nose-to-tail dining of this fantastic and versatile meat, combined with the tastes, textures and flavours of modern East African cuisine

At Expo 2020, countries from around the world will showcase their national dishes, giving visitors the opportunity to taste traditional and specialised cuisines from more than 200 different outlets. 











# Great Steak meets culinary showmanship at *Rhain Steakhouse*

It recently opened its doors in the Conrad Hotel on Sheikh Zayed road this August and is slated to be one of Dubai's chicest steakhouses as it enriches the city's dining and hospitality scene. Rhain Steakhouse is a new, upmarket steakhouse offering a variety of world-class meat cuts paired with spectacular interiors and a rich selection of entertainment to compliment a great night of dining.





Surrounded by elegant backdrops and run by hospitality-minded employees with years of experience in internationally renowned restaurants, Rhain welcomes its customers with exceptional service in a cosmopolitan and entertaining atmosphere. Designed to seat up to 155 guests, the venue boasts of several unique features such as a walk-in wine cellar, an open kitchen complimented with an authentic charcoal grill, table side food preparation and a show butcher, creating an unforgettable dining experience. A sophisticated private dining room, which hosts up to 12 pax, is also available for those looking for a little more privacy away from the crowds. Entertainment is at the core of Rhain, led by a resident DJ along with a lineup of live music and vibrant shows, creating an energetic atmosphere within a sophisticated setting.





## CULINARY ESCAPADES • RHAIN STEAKHOUSE

### MEAT AT RHAIN

Rhain serves up some of the highest quality, globally sourced meats in a blend of a contemporary and fine-dining experience, redefining steak one grill at a time. The luxurious menu reflects several delectable dishes set to please the pallets of true meat enthusiasts. The vibrant menu includes a selection of wet and dry aged meats, prime golden steaks, Wagyu beef, A5 Kobe, and the finest free-range lamb from Turkey to name a few. Adding to the entertainment, there is a meat display and show butcher who prepares and customizes guests' meat cuts right in front of their very eyes.

In parallel to its high-end menu, the luxurious steakhouse brings a list of expertly crafted, world-class cocktails to its venue, made with the freshest ingredients and homemade syrups, infusions, and purées. Rhain offers a specialty ginology menu and present guests with aged whiskeys, wines, and other beverages. The restaurant also features an exquisite walk-in wine room hosting an impressive wine collection as well as all of Rhain's hand-selected cigars, further enhancing the experience. For guests opting to drink by the glass, some fine wines are served through a Coravin preservation system, ensuring the last glass will always taste just as good as the first. 🍷





A scenic view of a river at dusk. The sky is filled with dramatic, layered clouds in shades of blue, purple, and pink. The water is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky. In the foreground, three motorboats with white hulls and blue canopies are visible on the water. The background shows a line of trees along the riverbank.

# ADVENTURES IN WILD AFRICA







# The Ra-Ikane River Cruise: A relaxing adventure along the Zambezi River

Follow in the wake of great explorers onboard the luxurious Ra-Ikane River Cruise, along the majestic Zambezi River in Victoria Falls. A voyage onboard Ra-Ikane consists of a selection of four relaxing cruises, including a Breakfast, Lunch, Birdwatching or Sunset cruises, showcasing the diverse landscape and wildlife located within this vibrant region.





Wake up to the sights and sounds of the African bush on an early morning Breakfast Cruise. Enjoy freshly brewed coffee and a continental breakfast while cruising along the palm-fringed river. For keen bird lovers, the Birdwatching Cruise presents an idyllic opportunity to spot rare and endemic birds such as the African Fin foot, Rock Pratincoles along with many other species.

The quiet hours of the Zambezi River can be enjoyed under the shaded canopy of the Ra-Ikane boats on a Lunch Cruise. An abundant buffet of cold meats, fresh salads, cheese, and biscuits is available, along with a bottomless selection of ice-cold beverages to keep you feeling refreshed and hydrated while out in the midday sun.

A Sunset Cruise is an ever-popular way to experience a dazzling African sunset over the majestic river. Take some time out from your busy safari itinerary to relax and enjoy an array of gourmet snacks accompanied by a selection of premium drinks, as you soak up the last rays of sunshine for the day.





### *Reminiscent of times past*

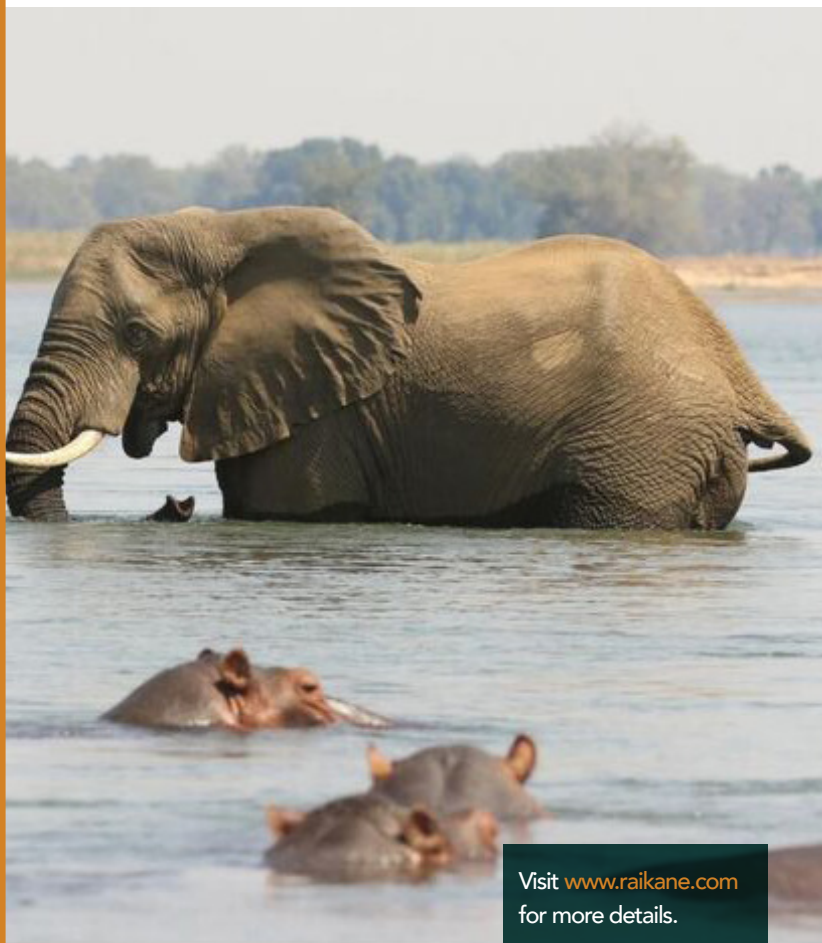
Fashioned after David Livingstone's exploration boat, the Ma-Robert, the Ra-Ikane fleet was named after one of Livingstone's instrumental guides, Lazarus Ra-Ikane, who accompanied him in the discovery of the Natural World Wonder, Victoria Falls. Each vessel is 10.4 metres long, 3.5 metres wide and comfortably holds up to 16 guests and a welcoming crew. Furnished with the finest quality teak chairs and tables, the boats exude a sense of old-world charm. Seats can be arranged to suit your party size, while collapsible tables ensure you are poised for the best viewing spot – so you won't miss out on the exceptional wildlife that can be viewed along the way. The boats can also be hired for private charter, for a more personal cruise or to celebrate a special and memorable occasion along the Zambezi River.

The low profile and slim structure of the boats allow effortless gliding through the water. Drifting gently in and out of narrow channels on the river – bringing you closer to the flora and fauna scattered along its banks. Two outboard motors supply ample power for the boats to cruise against the current of the Zambezi River. The small motors are quiet enough to soundlessly approach both wildlife and birdlife, bringing you closer to the action, without ever disturbing the animals in their natural habitat.

Each Ra-Ikane River Cruise boat is staffed with a professional and knowledgeable boat captain, equipped with vast experience of the area as well as the animals that inhabit it.







Visit [www.raikane.com](http://www.raikane.com) for more details.

Accompanying him, is a helpful and welcoming waiter who delivers exceptional service to ensure the utmost indulgence to your river cruise experience - allowing you to sit back, relax and soak in the wild surroundings.

The wild waters of the Zambezi River and its banks are home to some of Africa's most sought-after safari animals. Onboard each cruise, guests are guaranteed to experience the spectacular of sights and sounds of nature at its finest. Commonly spotted wildlife include hippo, crocodiles, buffalo, bush buck, monitor lizards, giraffe and guest will almost always experience the wonderful sight of elephants splashing around and cooling off in the refreshing waters of the river.

For keen birders, the Zambezi River offers a fantastic range of feathered life, with over 400 species found in Victoria Falls. Many of which are extremely rare and can only be spotted in select locations, such as along the banks of the Zambezi River – making it a bird lover's paradise! The best time for bird watching is during the rainy season from November through to April, this is when birdlife thrives against a beautiful flora that surrounds the river's edge. This is also the best time to spot the migratory birds that have returned home with their full breeding plumage – a spectacular sight to behold.

For a relaxing and calming experience onboard, comfortable shoes, a light jacket, hat, and sunglasses are recommended. Don't forget to pack binoculars and a camera to get an up-close view of the all the action along the riverbanks!

The Ra-Ikane fleet is owned and operated by Ilala Lodge Hotel and the Palm River Hotel. The intimate riverboats launch from the idyllic location in front of the Palm River Hotel. Guests staying at the hotels receive discounted rates on all Breakfast Cruise bookings. 





# CHISA AND THE GREEN SAFARIS CONSERVATION FOUNDATION: PLAYING A PART IN LOWERING GUEST CARBON FOOTPRINT



Green Safaris operates in five very different locations around Zambia and Malawi. The company carefully handpicked each spot for its pristine ecosystem, vulnerable wildlife, and isolated community, knowing that these were the places where they could make the most positive impact. So, whilst Chisa Busanga Camp focuses on taking care of travellers from around the world, Green Safaris Conservation Foundation (GSCF) uses Chisa as the cornerstone for an ever-growing number of conservation, community, and environment initiatives on in the Kafue and Busanga area. All GSCF projects aim to ensure the greatest creation of jobs with the smallest carbon footprint, minimal environmental impact, and maximum social impact.

**D**uring a visit to Chisa Busanga Camp, guests are encouraged to ask the team about the Green Safaris Conservation Foundation projects. Chisa Lodge itself was built, and still runs sustainably, with effective use of solar power, water, and the earth to minimise carbon footprints at the lodge.

The Green Safaris Conservation Foundation actively supports the Zambian Carnivore Project as well as Panthera, two organisations with a vital role within the Kafue National Park as they are dedicated to conserving large carnivores through a combination of research, active initiatives, education, and capacity-building. The Green Team supported the anti-snaring work of ZCP by upgrading and replacing equipment and supplies, while Panthera operates an anti-poaching unit in the Busanga Plains (north of us the lodge's location) which is funded by the foundation. The Foundation also contributed to the Panthera-managed radio network which is used all over the park for anti-poaching efforts.





## COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In collaboration with the Zambian NGO By Life Connected, the Green Safaris Conservation Foundation is implementing several projects in the closest community: Nalusanga. At Lukanga Community School, the Foundation funded the construction of a new secondary school building with three extra classrooms, all entirely built with the sustainable earth-bag building technique. This minimises the carbon footprint by reducing the need for concrete by up to 90% and by its superior temperature regulation. The building provides space for 360 children, at least 80% of whom would have been unlikely to continue their education if this school had not been expanded so close to home. A solar plant to power computer lessons at the Chunga Community school was also recently installed. Meanwhile, the success of the Conservation Education Club at the Lukanga Primary School is evident, where students learn about nature conservation directly from field professionals like safari guides, researchers from the Zambian Carnivore Programme and Panthera, and DNPW officers. This team of professionals then invite the students to experience the bush directly by giving them the full safari guided experience! Most students have never seen most of the wild animals right next door, and so this exercise carries the hope that personal wildlife experiences will encourage these students to protect nature for future generations. Ila Community Farm was founded by the Green Safaris Conservation Foundation, although it is run by the Nalusanga Community. The farm is fully





ADVENTURES IN WILD AFRICA • GREEN SAFARIS CONSERVATION FOUNDATION





sustainable, organic, and has the long-term goal of providing fresh produce for the community and lodges in the area. Many of the ingredients guests eat at Chisa Busanga Camp are fresh from the farm, meaning an extremely low transport-related carbon emission, and the positive promotion of sustainable employment within the community.

Chisa is also very proud of the new Bamboo Farm project, which aims to produce enough sustainable wood to support the livelihood of the local community. The goal is to replace charcoal for their cooking fires, as well as to provide sustainable wood for local maintenance and building projects.

Contributing towards the development of communities that are a part of Chisa's ecosystem is an integral part of the business' ethos. So metic-

ulous with its effort is Chisa such that even at the guest's arrival at Chisa, they are handed out a durable water-bottle to avoid single-use plastics and should they decide to keep the bottle when they leave, Chisa will charge 10 USD, all of which is dedicated directly to one of its community focused projects.

Sustainability in tourism ensures that operators foster initiatives that provide revenues for local communities, while simultaneously striving towards consciousness on the part of tourists who travel from across the world to experience life changing, positive tourist experiences. Green Safaris Conservation Foundation through its initiatives, works to promote cultural exchange between guests and the surrounding community with a bid to make difference in the lives of all the communities in which they operate. 🌱









# Ecotourism And Conservation Brand *Singita* Introduces Carbon-Neutral Guest Stays

The trending topic in tourism is sustainability and conscious travel, given the need to inform guests of their choices in consumption and how their decisions impact the environment. And so, as part of its ongoing commitment to sustainability and playing an active role in helping to fight climate change, leading conservation, and ecotourism brand Singita is weaving carbon neutral stays into its offering with a system that allows guests to seamlessly offset their carbon footprint, much to the delight of today's growing pool of environmentally conscious travellers.









A carbon-neutral levy has automatically been included in every booking since August 2021, with the funds generated being used to purchase verified carbon credits from accredited service providers in each region. In line with its commitment to One Planet Living's Zero Carbon Energy principle, Singita has already made great strides towards using renewable energy and energy-efficient equipment and building to optimise energy management. While steadfastly continuing with these in future, carbon neutrality – and ultimately, carbon negativity – is an extension of this commitment.

Says Dr Andrea Ferry, Singita's Group Sustainability Coordinator: "As an ecotourism and conservation brand, we believe we must play our part in fighting climate change. As part of our unwavering commitment to regenerative tourism, we are essentially enabling guests to enjoy a carbon-neutral Singita stay by integrating a carbon-emissions offset levy for accommodation. Added to that, we are also starting to offset all carbon emissions from staff business flights.

"We are constantly delighted to discover how likeminded and environmentally aware our guests are. They really do care, and we want to make it easier for them to tread as lightly as possible on the planet, while enjoying their time with us. Carbon-offsetting is one way of lightening this impact. Many guests choose Singita because our values and purpose to protect wilderness areas resonate with them. Integrating carbon-offsetting is a logical step to validate our and their commitment to a thriving planet."

### Tracking results


The funds generated from the levies are rigorously tracked, and the average carbon footprint of one night's accommodation was converted into a carbon offset cost for every stay. The

estimated current cost/tonne of carbon offset is \$10/tonne, and the monetary value of the offset will appear on each guest invoice. The guest levies for accommodation carbon offsets as well as the funds paid by Singita to offset emissions from staff business flights all contribute to Singita's overarching programme. Funds generated are used to purchase verified carbon credits from accredited service providers in each of the regions in which Singita operates.

In South Africa, it's the Climate Neutral Group's Wonderbag project (VCS accredited) and in Tanzania, Carbon Tanzania's Yaeda Valley Forest project (Plan Vivo accredited). In Rwanda, carbon credits will be procured from Carbon Tanzania, and in Zimbabwe, from the Climate Neutral Group – until accredited local offset providers for those countries are identified. Carbon offset projects not only mitigate carbon, but also provide various other benefits for local communities.

### Addressing the United Nations SDG question

Carbon-mitigation projects offer several advantages, including benefits for local communities and biodiversity. The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goals aim to address global inequalities and challenges by 2030, while aiding development and protecting the environment. Supporting carbon-offsetting projects that align with as many of these SDGs as possible means that their impact will go well beyond carbon mitigation.

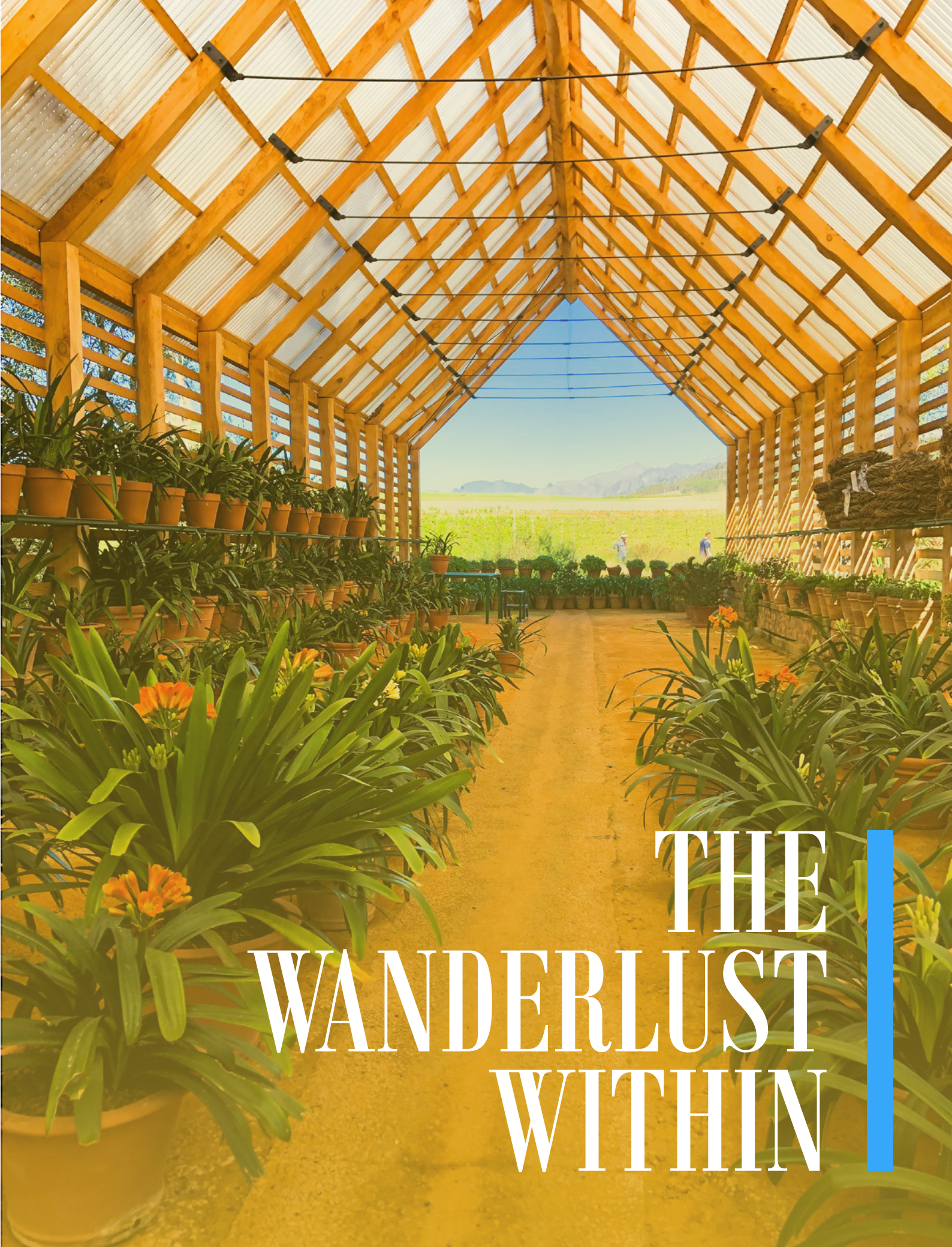
2021 will also see the launch of the Global Goals for Nature, one of which is achieving carbon neutrality. Singita's 100-year purpose to preserve and protect large areas of African wilderness for future generations is completely in step with this mindset, and each of the projects benefitting from its carbon-offsetting programme was chosen with these goals in mind. 



For more information on Singita's far-reaching conservation and sustainability efforts, please visit

<https://singita.com/conservation>





# THE WANDERLUST WITHIN





# Umhlanga's Oyster Box Hotel Experience

If the last two years has taught us anything, it is that life is short. Tomorrow is not promised to us, we need to make the most of every moment we have. If you have a dream, put it into action. Start by writing it down. Make it a reality. Visit that dream destination you have always set your heart on.

By Debbie Lombard







**M**y mission has always been to explore the fascinating continent of Africa onto which I was born. Living in the dynamic city of Johannesburg South Africa has given me a great platform from which to do this. From Bungee Jumping the famous Storms River mouth, diving the magnificent Indian Ocean, Fly Fishing the rivers of Mpumalanga, to luxuriating in the most opulent hotels and lodges, I have a passion for it all.

My studies in psychology and communications have given me a unique perspective into understanding the people and locations I have had the privilege to experience. Discovering new places, helps you discover new places within yourself. The benefits of creating wonderful memories and adding sensory experiences to your everyday life are huge. At a time when our mental well being is of the utmost importance, don't let life pass you by. Don't forget to dream.

And so, when the opportunity came for me to experience the true nature of



South African hospitality by enjoying a stay at the iconic Oyster Box Hotel in Durban, I was ready!

### SNIPPETS OF TRUE SOUTH AFRICAN HOSPITALITY

Situated on Umhlanga's beautiful beach front, with the famous Umhlanga Lighthouse proudly guarding her Indian ocean panorama, this hotel leaves an indelible memory of warmth, luxury and welcome on all who visit her.

From the moment you step onto the red carpet leading into the timelessly classic lobby, one is transported by the friendly smiles of the attentive staff who welcome you. A member of the Red Carnation Hotel Collection, the Oyster Box Hotel has won numerous awards including being voted the No.1 Top Resort Hotel in Africa at the Travel and Leisure 'World's Best' Awards.

The combination of timeless elegance and modern conveniences put together in a uniquely African way, makes this hotel a place to which one always wishes to return.

There is perhaps little more pleasurable than dozing on their iconic red and white striped loungers around a glittering pool, the waves crashing dramatically in the background while the more immediate sound of your champagne glass being refilled creates a wonderful feeling of both freedom and being taken care of.

The Oyster Box Hotel offers an impressive array of dining experiences from the more formal Grill room renowned for fine dining and exceptional service, to the more relaxed Ocean Terrace Restaurant where their famous Durban








Curry Buffet can be sampled while one's eyes feast on the magnificent ocean views.

Three different bar experiences each with their own individual charm, ensure there is the perfect place to enjoy the impressive variety of drinks offered. Whether it's a cozy night cap in the timeless elegance of the Chukka bar, pre-dinner drinks on the vibrant Rooftop Lighthouse Bar, or a refreshing sip of a cool Sauvignon Blanc in the seaside themed Oyster Bar, you will feel the worries of the world slip away.

The 86 rooms, suites, and villas, offer a variety of garden-facing and sea view

options with the most splendid being the Presidential Suite. A stunning two-level private apartment with its own dedicated butler. Each space uniquely designed with bespoke furnishings and original artwork, to create a haven of relaxation.

An award-winning spa waits to welcome you to its six treatment rooms, infinity pool and tranquility lounge.

When looking back on your stay at the Oyster Box Hotel, a lingering feeling of ultimate luxury, pampering, a unique blend of warmth and friendliness leaves one thought predominant in one's mind, "How soon can I return?" 











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# “IT’S A LIFESTYLE” *with* PATRICIABLACC

OF FRIDAY GARDEN TOURS AT  
BABYLOSTOREN AND MORE



# W

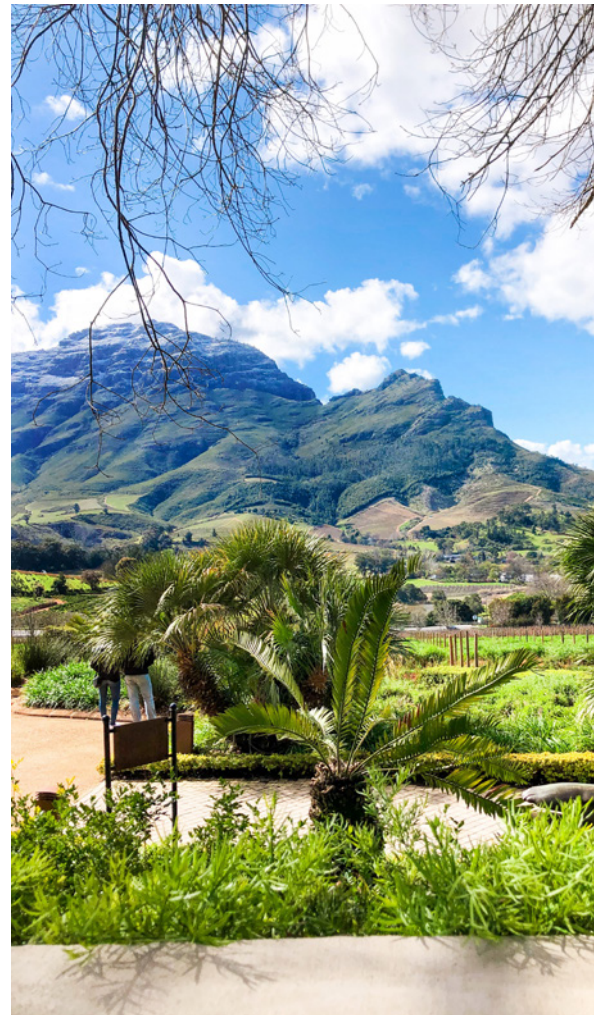
hat's better than spending the weekend in the cape winelands with sunny weather and superbly cool bespoke outdoor activities? We all look for an escape from time to time, and staycations in the city are wonderful for that, but nothing says disconnection like a weekend in the winelands, drinking copious amounts of wine, horse riding on the beach, outdoor spa treatments and yummy food.

I recently took some time away from work and school to explore the winelands further, disconnect from the digital noise and just re-center myself. Word of advice to all on a quest for self-love and rediscovery of the things that matter: few things rival taking some time to yourself to just let loose and live a little. We all deserve a break here and there, and so back to the winelands I headed for yet another weekend of serenity and pristine views.

## **FRIDAY GARDEN TOUR AT BABYLOSTOREN**

Located in Franschhoek, the wine farm and garden are about an hour away from the city centre. Upon arrival, you'll be asked to pay a nominal R20 entrance





fee that allows you full access to the gardens, gift shops and restaurants. If you ever wanted to travel to the Italian countryside without leaving South Africa, then this is the place for you. Luscious greenery with lemon and orange trees all over, the smell of freshly bloomed flowers and the sound of bees buzzing away as they begin to pollinate the plants, are sure to remind you of the beautiful intricacies of life; much needed in this fast-paced life we live.

The garden at Babylonstoren is designed in such a way that with the map given to you upon entry, you can navigate your way through the succulent gardens, herb gardens and flower patches whilst learning more about the space and how it is managed. Lunch is served at the Greenhouse restaurant which offers a light garden menu of salads, soups, and sandwiches.

### **HORSE RIDING ON THE BEACH**

My Saturday morning started with me riding a horse through the shallow waters of the ocean while watching the sunrise. Let me just say; horse riding on the beach is one of the most relaxing and peaceful activities you can enjoy, one that allows you to take in as much of the picturesque scenery as you can muster with countless Instagrammable photo-ops. I decided to tick off this item from my bucket list by driving an hour away from the city centre to Noordhoek to catch an early morning horse ride on the beach. It was undoubtedly one of the most tranquil experiences that I have ever had. Full disclosure: it was my first time on a horse, so I was a bit scared, especially when the horse was walking through the water. Nonetheless, I highly rec-



ommend it as it was an hour of pure bliss, with the soothing sounds of the waves, fresh morning breeze and views.

### **SATURDAY AFTERNOON LUNCH IN STEENBERG**

After starting the morning on such a great note, I thought it best to keep the festivities going and what better way to do that than lunch at the beautiful Steenberg Wine Estate. Steenberg Wine Farm is located 30 - 45 minutes away from the city centre in the Tokai area. Within the Steenberg wine farm is the Steenberg Hotel and Spa, Tryn Restaurant, and the Wine Tasting Bistro. On this occasion I opted for the Tryn Restaurant experience, settling down in their contemporary space. The establishment offers an exclusive and well thought out fine-dining menu along with a well- matched wine list and a fantastic visual backdrop bursting with colours, tones and textures of burnt orange and mustard. Anyone who knows me knows that I love a good glass of wine. They have an extensive wine list that offers wines from the farm and surrounding farms and there's also an excellent collection of art throughout the space for your viewing pleasure. For my meal, I ordered a pork belly which came with a side of garlic mash potato, and I was pleasantly surprised. Kudos to the chef for making my lunch experience truly memorable. An absolute 10/10

### **SUNDAY MORNING SPA AT STEENBERG**

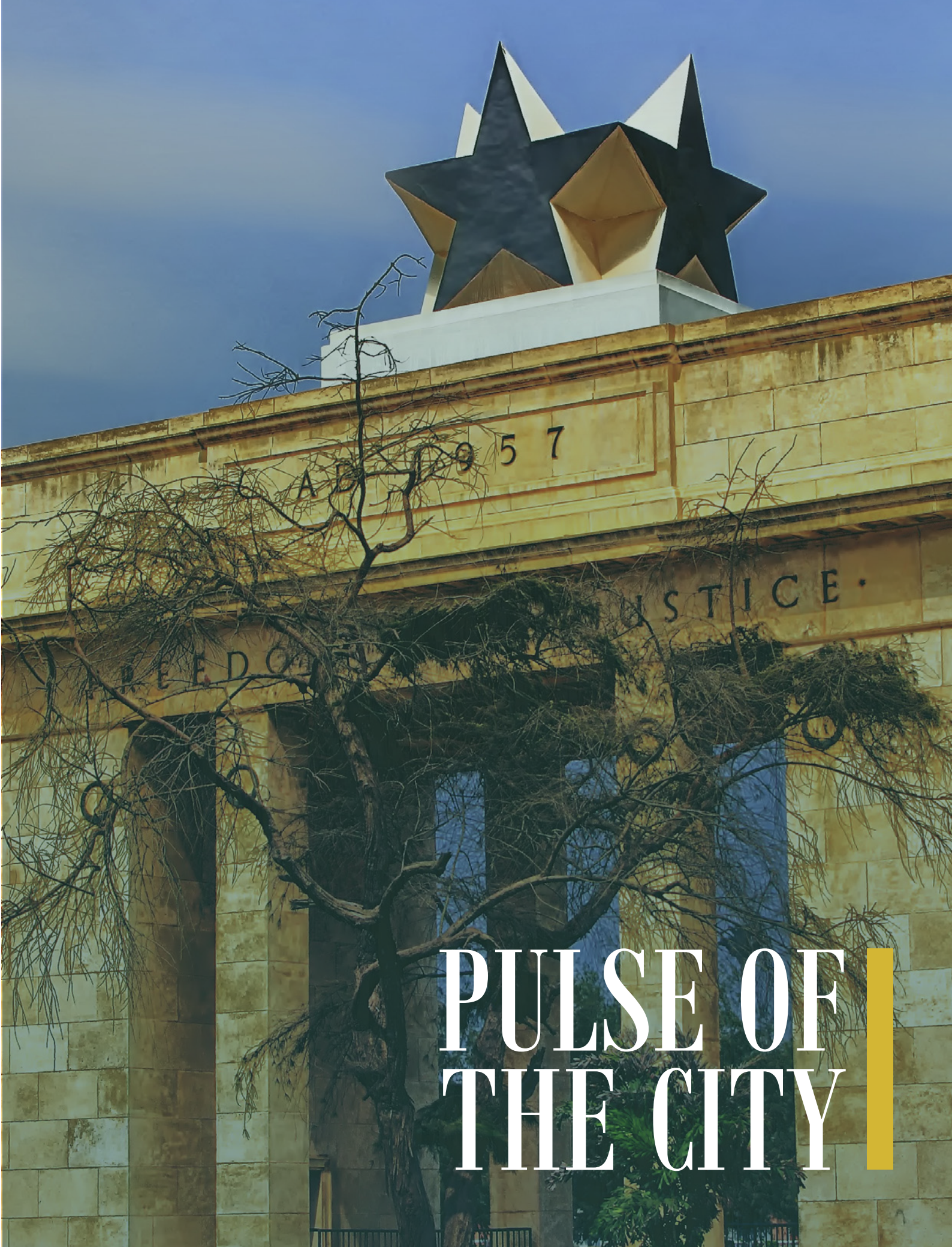
Spending a Sunday morning at this stunning spa was the exact cure for the day-to-day stresses of life. If it's a reset and much needed massage you are looking for, then Steenberg Spa will deliver on its pampering promise. It is a beautiful escape that everyone needs to experience, with my checking in for a 45 minute back, neck and head massage that felt like my body as being told "sweet somethings" that left me feeling transformed. Afterwards I headed over to the poolside lounge to order a cup of relaxing Earl Grey tea with honey. A real sense of relaxation and serenity permeates the entire place as the spa really does give a full sensory experience.

### **SUNDAY AFTERNOON WINE TASTING AT DELAIRE GRAFF**

To end off my near perfect weekend, a wine tasting date at the stunning Delaire Graff was the best option. The architectural masterpiece has some of the best wines in the Stellenbosch region. I frequent Delaire Graff just for the views and Sauvignon Blanc, so it was only fitting that it be part of the wholesome weekend. Depending on what you are looking for, Delaire Graff boasts a hotel, a fine dining restaurant, stunning gardens as well as a tasting lounge that offers wine tasting both indoors and outdoors. The wine tasting is between R75 and R320 depending on what you are looking to try. Sitting outside, wine tasting under the warm weather and staring at the mountains in the distance was the best ending I could ask for to an incredible weekend! Till next time! 🍷







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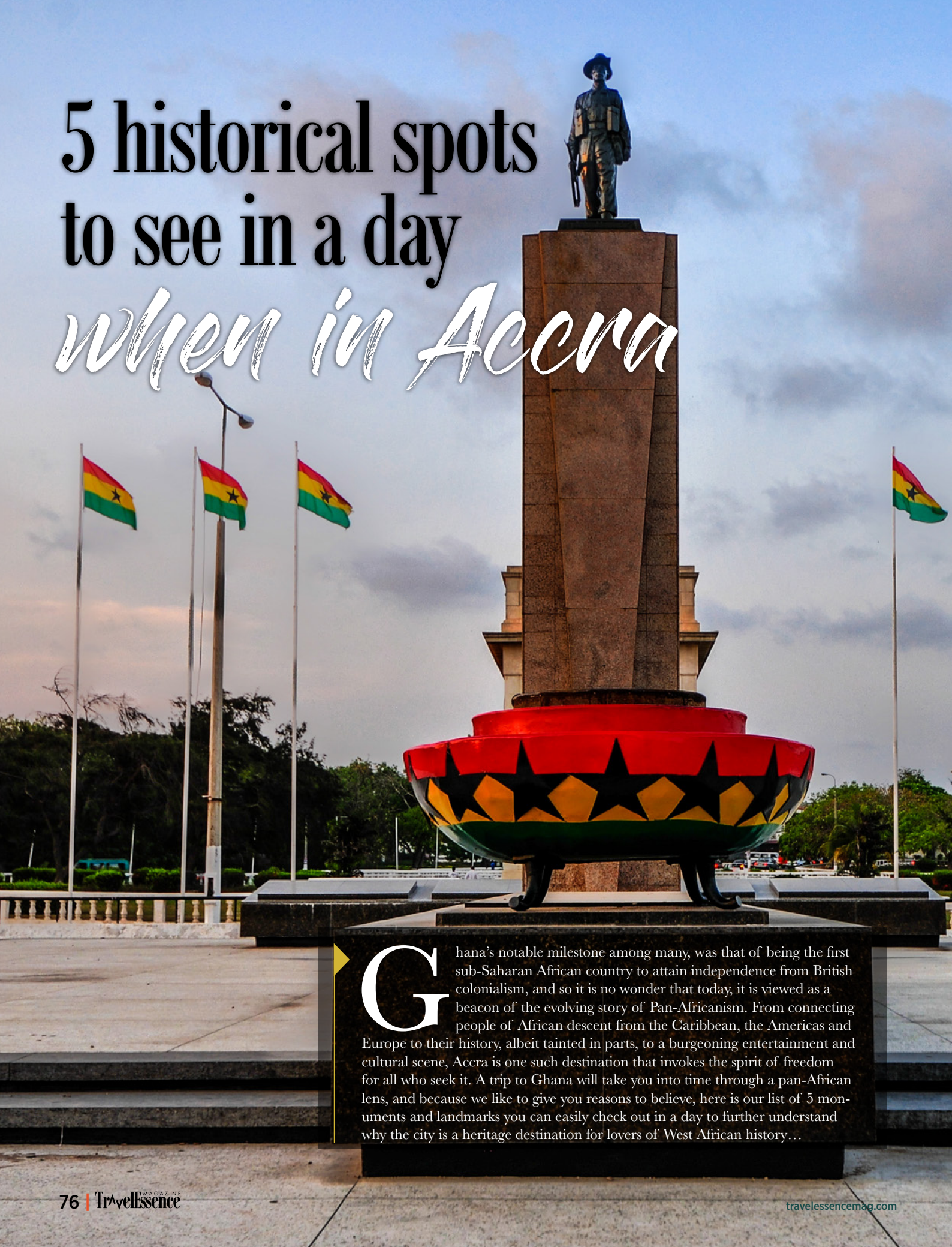
FREEDOM JUSTICE

# PULSE OF THE CITY





# 5 historical spots to see in a day *when in Accra*



**G**hana's notable milestone among many, was that of being the first sub-Saharan African country to attain independence from British colonialism, and so it is no wonder that today, it is viewed as a beacon of the evolving story of Pan-Africanism. From connecting people of African descent from the Caribbean, the Americas and Europe to their history, albeit tainted in parts, to a burgeoning entertainment and cultural scene, Accra is one such destination that invokes the spirit of freedom for all who seek it. A trip to Ghana will take you into time through a pan-African lens, and because we like to give you reasons to believe, here is our list of 5 monuments and landmarks you can easily check out in a day to further understand why the city is a heritage destination for lovers of West African history...

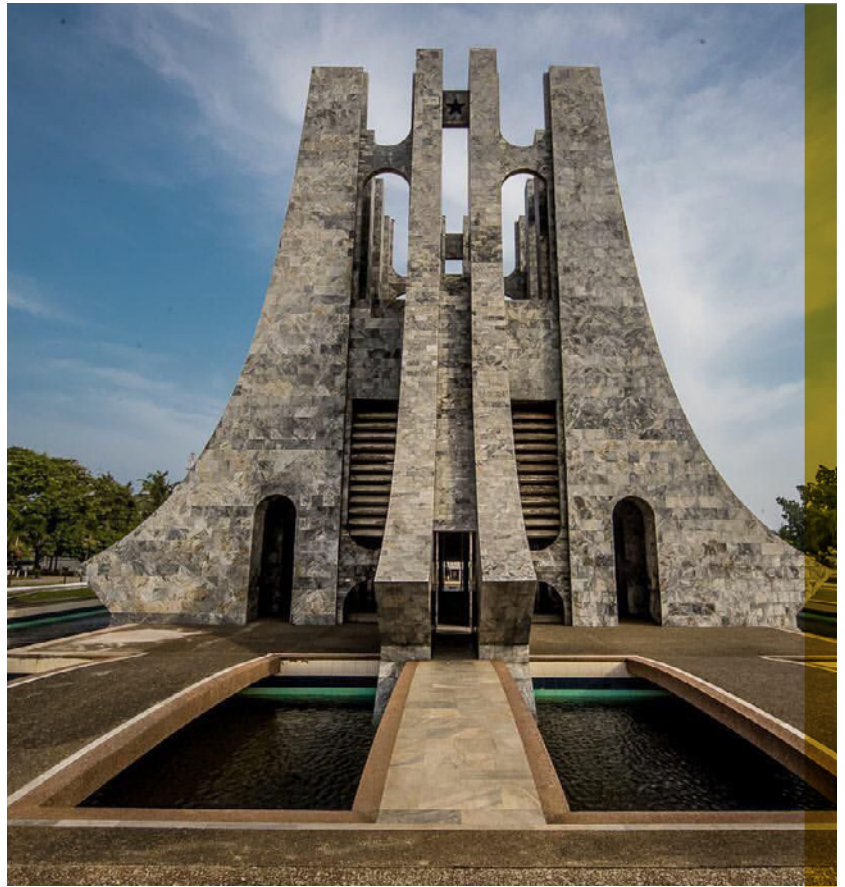


## 1. Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park

Named after Ghana's first President who was a symbol of Africanism, and built in honour of his final resting place, the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park and Mausoleum is located in downtown Accra, and chronicles Ghana's journey to independence from colonial rule through exhibits of rare artefacts. Tours journey visitors into time, giving them an in-depth history of the sub-Saharan struggle for independence, and a spirited sense of victory and political consciousness.

The mausoleum was designed by Don Arthur and is an architectural representation of an upside-down sword, which in the Akan culture is a symbol of peace. Layered from top to bottom with Italian marble, with a black star at its apex to symbolize unity. The Mausoleum's interior design aesthetic also boasts marble flooring, a mini mastaba looking marble grave marker that is surrounded by river-washed rocks.

Taking you further into the history of the Great Kwame Nkrumah is the museum, which houses his personal belongings, including books he wrote, photograph archives and official photographs. Visitors can immerse themselves in a unique photo collection which features pictures of Nkrumah with several renowned leaders of his time, including Pope Pius XII, Queen Elizabeth II, President John Kennedy of the United States, and many others.



## 2. Independence Square

Also known as the Black Star Square for the large black star located at the top of Independence Arch, Independence Square commemorates Ghanaian independence from British rule in 1957. This landmark also features an eternal flame first lit by

Nkrumah himself in 1961 after he commissioned the construction of the square.

Should you visit Accra at a time when the nation is commemorating any one of its more prolific events that bring citizens together, such as the Independence Day Celebrations on the 6th of March, it's

commonplace to witness military and civic parades, as well as a myriad of cultural performances as throngs of people partake of these festivities. Also, the square is home to three monuments that encapsulate the fight for independence and liberation for Ghana, and these include the Independence Arch, the Liberation Day Monument, and the Black Star Monument.

Visitors to the Square will also see a statue of a soldier facing the Independence Arch, a commemorative representation of the Ghanaians who lost their lives in their fight for Ghana's independence.





### 3. Osu Castle

Also known as Christiansborg Castle or Fort Christiansborg, Osu Castle is a 17th-century landmark located on the shores of the vibrant township of Osu, right on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean's Gulf of Guinea. Built first by the Danes and having changed hands through time between Denmark, Norway, Portugal, the Akwamu, Britain, and finally post-Independence Ghana, Osu Castle is today listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

In 2017, the castle was converted into a Presidential Museum as part of Ghana's 60th-anniversary legacy project and is widely viewed as an iconic building that stands to present the unique possessions of past presidents and national artefacts that take guests through more of Ghana's past.





#### 4. *Jamestown Lighthouse*


Jamestown Lighthouse isn't a tourist attraction in the more traditional sense, but many tourists often find themselves exploring its environs as part of a walking tour of the fishing community in which the lighthouse stands. Located in one of Accra's oldest neighbourhoods, the Jamestown Lighthouse's red and white colours jut out against the city's blue skies, giving one a panoramic view of the surrounding area and Accra's skyline.

Originally built by the British in 1871, and later replaced by the structure we now see today, one can summit the 28-meter-tall lighthouse to catch some cool views of Accra, before continuing on to experience the pulse of the area below.



#### 5. *National Museum of Ghana*

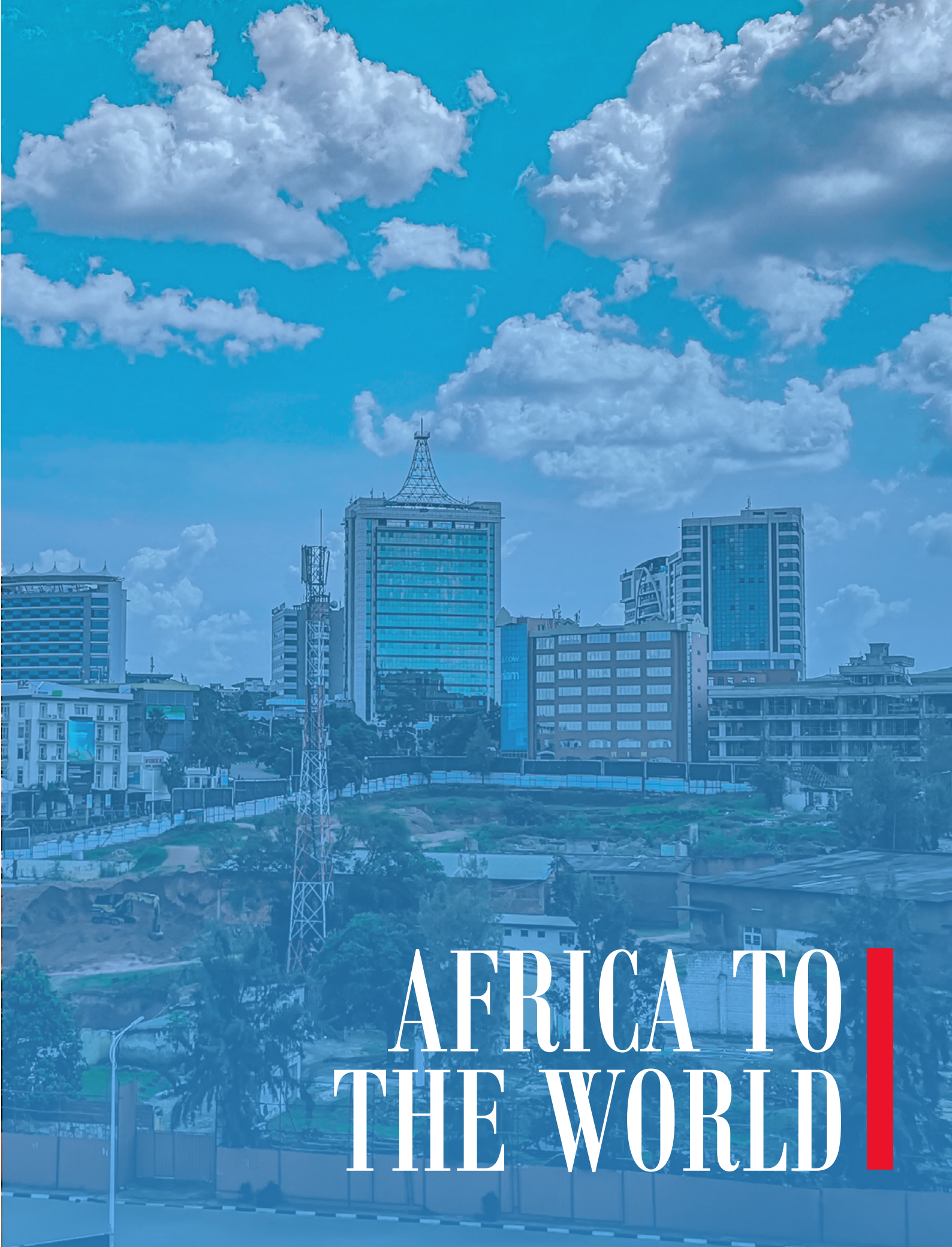
Owned and operated by the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (GMMB), though temporarily closed at the point of sharing our picks for top monuments to see when in Accra, this museum opened its doors in 1957 first, showcasing three primary collection areas: archaeology, ethnography, and art. Today, the National Museum of Ghana is widely viewed as a destination that once doors reopen, will continue to grant visitors an opportunity to absorb more of Ghana's cultural history, which are used to weave together a story about Ghana's rich cultural history.

Beyond the entertainment, opportunities for exploration and culinary experiences that come standard with any trip to a new destination, is connecting with the history and heritage of a place. Steeped in history, and symbolic of West Africa's historical and revolutionary spirit is Ghana, with its capital and largest city Accra, viewed as a fast-evolving hub for heritage consciousness, creative and cultural expression. 









# AFRICA TO THE WORLD





# Chronicles of a lover of Rwanda

By Marlon Weir



I'll start off by answering this question of "Why Rwanda?" by listing the standout attributes one would notice upon spending some time in the Land of a Thousand Hills:

1. **Safety**
2. **Cleanliness**
3. **Rule of Law**
4. **Strong Institutions**
5. **Ease of Doing Business**
6. **Affordability**
7. **Development**
8. **Natural Beauty**
9. **Community**
10. **Opportunity for Collaboration**

I continue to say it over and over again when I get asked, "Why Rwanda?" Simply put, Rwanda is a very special place and here are just 10 of my reasons why.

## 1. *Safety in light of COVID-19*

The first thing that I noticed upon landing at the Rwanda International Airport in the capital city of Kigali is how safe I was made to feel. I moved to Rwanda as the world began to make sense of COVID-19 and so being in a global pandemic situation, many people were and still are afraid to travel to popular European, American, and Asian destinations much less to niche African destinations like Rwanda. I was pleased to see the measures that are being taken to ensure the safety of guests to the country in the form of airport personnel in full medical overalls, including face shields and gloves as they helped passengers throughout the airport. We were made to feel welcome but also safe from a pandemic mitigation standpoint. They even had smart technology helping to inform passengers in the form of robots that had COVID information announced and displayed in multiple languages – an absolute win for guests from any part of the world.

Outside the airport upon my arrival, there were special



COVID hotels that require 24-hour quarantine with rapid testing to further ensure that visitors had not been contaminated in transit. After the quarantine period, guests are free to explore the country. Rwanda also takes special precautions such as social distancing, mask mandates in public spaces and curfews to lessen the spread of the virus – a norm in most places across the world at the minute, but still appreciated when enforced.

In addition to health safety protocols, a physical security presence is prevalent throughout Rwanda. As a resident or guest, you are ensured that you will be safe as you walk the streets and go about your day as there are uniformed, professional security personnel posted throughout the country, helping residents and guest to feel safe beyond the obvious concerns that come with a global pandemic.

## *2. The country is incredibly clean!*

Hands down, Kigali, Rwanda is the cleanest city I have ever been to, and I have experienced major international cities like New York, London, and Dubai. A welcome sight is that the notion of cleanliness is seemingly ingrained in the social fabric of the country and not forced. The residents take a great pride in keeping Kigali clean.

Let me just add as well that the air quality is something that you will notice early on. Rwanda is blessed with two rainy seasons, which naturally clean the air and keep the environment green and the atmosphere cool and fresh. This makes it enjoyable for an outdoor enthusiast like myself to enjoy my daily runs and touristic excursions outside.

## *3. Law abiding citizenry*

When you think about a developing country, particularly in Africa, one may conjure images of instability or corruption, sometimes unfairly so, due to one-sided media and other times justly as it is the reality of things on the ground in some places. But In Rwanda however, you'll be delighted to note that they have a visible and well-publicized 'zero-corruption' policy and the country's citizens





and policymakers really work hard to keep things fair and balanced for all.

#### *4. Strong Institutions have become benchmarks for the continent*

There are strong and efficient institutions in Rwanda that are increasingly incorporating ICT for efficiency and transparency. Quite simply, things just work, as one would expect them to in a free and open society.

#### *5. Ease of Doing Business*

As a global citizen and proud Pan-African, I came to Rwanda to not only experience life in Africa but to put my money where my mouth is and establish an equitable, impactful, and sustainable business on the continent. It is a technology company called AFRIKANEKT that provides an all-



in-one solution for multiple societal needs. My company chose Rwanda because of what we heard and discovered to be true about the ease of doing business in the country. This has been a very welcome aspect for me in just about every way. The main business hub is called Rwanda Development Board or RDB and they ensure you can set your business up quickly and efficiently all within a matter of hours or a few days at the very most. Also, ICT plays a major role as most functions can be done online although I preferred the human touch and everyone at RDB was very helpful and friendly.

#### *6. Affordability*

Rwanda is very affordable, period!

As a 'repatriate' in a 'new' country (although I identify as culturally black African), a startup business owner and maneuvering life during an unprecedented global pandemic, budgets are tight to say the least. In Rwanda, I have found the cost of living to be very affordable and what I would say is more than fair – from eating to shopping to housing, things are very reasonable. Also, there is often room to bargain with the independent business operators such as market vendors and you get great deals for quality items.

#### *7. Rwanda is on a quest of rapid development*

Some people call Rwanda, the Singapore





of Africa due to its rapid, strategic development and ambitious infrastructure projects. Visionary leadership coupled with a business and technology friendly environment is leading the way for citizens, resident, and investors alike to shape the country into a modern African model for prosperity where aspiration and hope are alive and well. I enjoy seeing such landmarks as the Rwanda Convention Center, the Kigali Arena and Amahoro (Peace) Stadium. There are also several mega projects in the works like the new Bugesera International Airport which when completed will serve 18 million passengers annually.

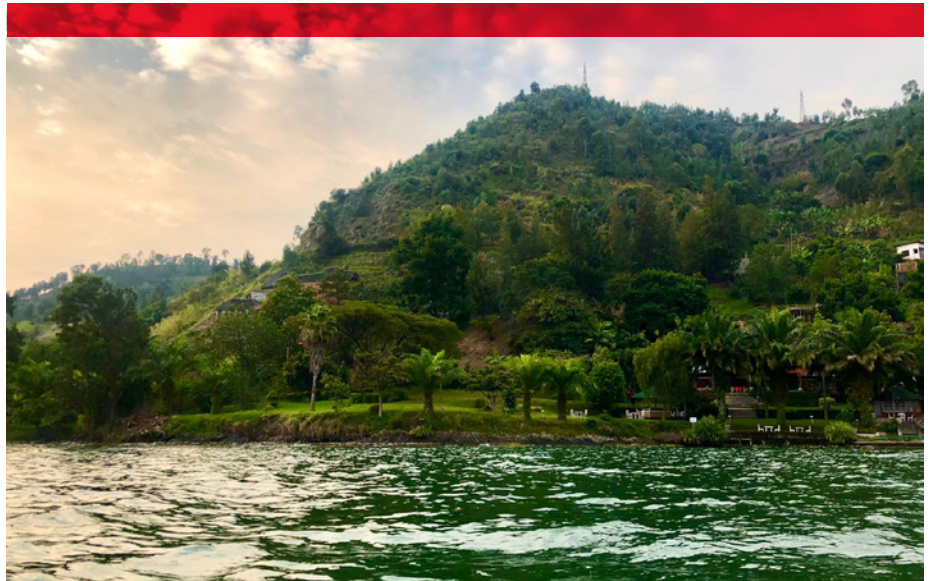
Education is important to the country and that can be seen in institutions such as University of Rwanda, Carnegie Mellon University Africa and the African Leadership University.

Rwanda aims to be the hub for sport in Africa as witnessed by such world class events as the recent hosting of the inaugural Basketball Africa League (BAL).

Entrepreneurship is also greatly encouraged, especially in the sectors of agriculture, manufacturing, processing and ICT.

### *8. Rwanda boasts incredible natural beauty*

Rwanda is called the 'Land of a Thousand Hills' and for good reason. I'm no expert on topography but I do know hills from being born in Jamaica which also has its' fair share of inclines. I can truly say that my 'littkle island in the sun' has nothing on the Rwanda hills. Visibly, they range from,





“oh, this isn’t so bad” to “hold on, let me catch my breath.” That being said, the visual theater that this provides is stunningly beautiful. It can be said that there are no bad views in Rwanda. Literally, everywhere you look are lush, green mountains in the distance and as you drive out of the city, you get to experience them up close and personal... truly, breath taking.

Now, let’s talk water features – Rwanda resides in the African Great Lakes region and the lakes are spectacular. Some like Lake Kivu and the Twin Lakes seem so vast that they can be mistaken for oceans by the untrained eye. I do enjoy a serene experience on the water whether swimming, kayaking, or boating – the water is clean and usually quite calm...

Did I say ‘calm?’ ...Well, there was that volcano eruption recently on the border area with Congo. That was indeed an experience, a bit of nature at its purest and most primal. Luckily, there was no loss of life and just temporary displacement. All in all, feeling the earth ‘move’ is a whole experience in itself!

Ok, relax people! Rwanda is a nature lovers’ paradise and honestly speaking, there are not enough words to describe the beauty of the country or how many ways one can enjoy themselves in the natural surroundings which are everywhere – from mountain gorillas to the majestic mountains themselves, the views never get old.

### 9. *A strong sense of Community*

A popular saying in Rwanda is ‘we are together.’ That sentiment is beautiful and authentic in so many ways, as one can feel that Ubuntu spirit as you go about the country. Whether you are in the capital city or the rural areas, there is a true sense of community and overall pride in being Rwandan, which I love to see. Every place has a story to tell from their history and Rwanda’s recent history is quite well known and tragic. This is what makes today’s Rwanda seem so miraculous. From living in the country and being with the people for close to a year now, I can tell you that this has been no easy feat, it took work, cooperation, and dialogue and this all continues daily.

### 10. *Opportunity for Collaboration*

As in the rest of Africa, Rwanda has a very youthful population. With youth, comes opportunity. As the co-founder of an impact business, I have found that there is massive potential for collaboration and growth working with established organizations and the youth in the country through strategic partnerships and internships which we have officially spear-headed as part of our ASR (African Social Responsibility) program and look to duplicate throughout the continent and the African diaspora globally. So, truly... ‘We are together!’

So, we all know that no place is perfect, or maxi is absolute, but Rwanda is a small nation in the heart of Africa striving for big things on the global stage and I am here for it all – right place, right time – hoping to see you soon in Rwanda. 🌍







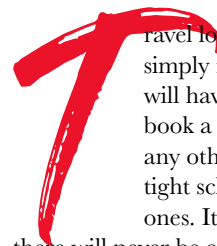


# Full-Day Road Triple through the UAE



A viable travelust quick fix for time constrained local travelers looking to discover the UAE.

By Bianca Phumudzo Ndou



Travel lovers know that when the travelust kicks, you simply must get your fix. Meanwhile, as “adulting” will have it, we don’t always have enough time to book a full-on staycation, vacation, bae-cation, or any other type of any-cation due to time constraints, tight schedules, and conflicting timetables with loved ones. It is for this reason that I came to realise that there will never be ample time to do a lot of what we would love to leisurely. If we are to live our fullest lives, this decision hinges on our ability to create pockets of time where we switch from the rudimentary busyness of life to soaking in moments of stillness or sensory overload – whatever it is your travel inspired mind craves. If this is the case with you – wherein you are super busy juggling multiple balls and all that - I would highly recommend that you go on a Road Triple as a feasible remedy. What’s a road triple you may ask? Picture one eventful weekend where you and tribe choose a day where you commit to simply living your best lives without so much luxury of time. In our case, we decided to embark on an all-day road trip across the UAE with 3 action-packed pit-stops!



### *Your standard Checklist:*

- ✓ Car check-up (fuel top up, water, oil, tires, etc.)
- ✓ Water, fruits, snacks for the drives in-between the stops
- ✓ Hats, caps, umbrellas
- ✓ Comfortable attire for walking, climbing and physical activities (the girls and I wore light T-shirts, shorts, and trainers / sneakers)
- ✓ Decent swimwear (in our case with living in the UAE, we opted for more modest apparel for the beach)
- ✓ Your girl pals, fun friends, a lover, or the family! Whoever you go with, should be someone you enjoy spending a lot of time with!
- ✓ Good camera for Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, or vlogs (we had a GoPro and iPhones, it was sufficient)
- ✓ Fire playlist with sing-along type of songs, you might or might not break into karaoke on the way!



## *The road triple*

### 1. KHOR FAKKAN BEACH

The drive from Dubai to Khor Fakkan was about an hour and 40 minutes, and we were spoilt with plenty views of the bouldering dry mountains that looked more like large rocks than mountains. Further along on our journey to the port city, we encountered a series of tunnels, one of them being a lengthy 2.7km, which happens to be the longest tunnel in the UAE - Al Sidra Tunnel, which connects Sharjah and Khor Fakkan. As you enter the city, it's quite compact and there aren't so many people around, the less the numbers the better during a pandemic! You get a feel of a centralized city center, with traditional concentrated buildings, stores, and mosques parallel to Khor Fakkan Road before reaching the beach.

#### **What to expect at Khor Fakkan Beach?**

- \* Parasailing, for a duration of about 8-10 minutes priced at approximately AED100 per person. Couple's prices available too.
- \* 30 minutes boat rides rentals at AED30 per person.

- \* More water activities including jet skiing, snorkeling, and diving
- \* Perfect scenery for couples, group or family picnics with home made delights, a cheese, fruit & cold cuts board perhaps (minus the wine). Alternatively local restaurants and cafeterias are available for meals.
- \* Stretch of beach sand and grass for sporting activities for groups, we spotted a game of volleyball in session.
- \* Playground for kids and a family friendly park just close to the beach.

### 2. HATTA LAKE

We enjoyed about 2.5 hours at the beach then we set out for another adventure, by driving via Khor Fakkan Road for about another hour and a half to our next destination, Hatta Lake. We unexpectedly sighted a few camels in the deserted areas as we drove. The mountains were slightly greener than the boulder ones we saw on our way to Khor Fakkan. There were way too many roundabouts, however, the combination of the fountains and luring sunset made it forgivable and incredible to drive to. The increase of traffic will be an evident indication that you've reached the reputable Hatta Lake.





### What to expect at Hatta Lake?

- \* Boating options including kayaks, canoes, paddle boats, and motorized round boats for larger groups, ranging from AED60 per person onwards.
- \* Steep set of stairs to get to the summit, where you can look down at the dam.
- \* MANY PEOPLE, probably because it was a weekend. Social distancing guidelines are observed, however, if you're still a bit paranoid about being around people, you might want to go on weekdays.
- \* Long waits to get to the front of the boating queues, but very well-organized points of service.
- \* I'm a sucker for street food, hence I noticed the variety offered in the arrival parking zone, which is really an extensive piece of land (free parking whoop whoop)
- \* Very small WC facilities, 3 cubicles only for the ladies and a very tiresome queue, but well-coordinated attendants monitoring & replenishing the resources (toilet paper, handwash, sanitizer, etc.)

### 3. LAST EXIT KHAWANEEJ

As it got too dark to enjoy the scenery and too chilly to participate in the water sports, we journeyed on to our 3rd and destination for the day. Let me just say, at this point we really were tired, and the drive was rather dreary to say the least, but as soon as we see the lights at the last exit, we are determined to end our day with a blast! If you've never been to one, a "Last Exit" is a street food truck park which is normally a pit stop as you exit Dubai into another Emirate. The Exits are themed, Al Khawaneej was ranch themed, and so well decorated with crusty cars, rusted drums, caravan-type food trucks and little rides for kids.





### What to expect at Al Khawaneej Last Exit?

- \* Basically, a plethora of food trucks and snack attacks, from burgers, doughnuts, ice cream, popcorn, candy floss to sushi, basically all your guilty pleasures.
- \* Instagram-worthy props, rustic cars and trucks, ponds, caravans, rides, etc.
- \* Perfect for fun and games with mixed groups, activities for kids and families as well as romantic strolls for couples.

We chose those 3 areas of adventure, we preferred medium adventure activities, as opposed to high adventure activities! However, there are alternatives that you could explore on your Road Triple, you can even make it a Road Quadruple, if you may, especially if you can afford some rest the

To follow more of Bianca's travel adventures and lifestyle experiences as an African expat resident in the UAE, connect with her via [@ladystature](#)



following day, below are a few suggestions:

### *Road Triple Alternatives:*

- \* Khor Fakkan Museum
- \* Hatta Heritage Village
- \* Fujairah East Coast Tour
- \* Hatta Safari to Fossil Rock & Honeybee Garden.

As much as it was a fun-filled FULL day, we still did not cover half of the several activities that each mystifying town has to offer. You could return 3 more times and still not repeat any activities from previous visits. Personally, I look forward to visiting the museum and heritage village, as I would like to know the history of Khor Fakkan and it's surrounding areas, every town has a story to tell, and I love to hear the untold tales and mysteries of new places! 







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ARE YOU LOOKING FOR MORE COVERAGE OF YOUR **TRAVEL, HOSPITALITY, LEISURE AND LIFESTYLE BRAND** AND OPERATION TO EXPAT TRAVELLERS IN THE UAE?

ARE YOU A **TRAVEL BLOGGER OR CONTENT CREATOR** LOOKING TO SHARE YOUR STORY WITH THE WORLD THROUGH AN ENGAGING TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE FOCUSED PLATFORM?

Register your interest in becoming a contributor or send your proposed content (press release, feature article, listing guides or reviews) to [info@travelessencemag.com](mailto:info@travelessencemag.com).

All content should be accompanied by relevant hi-resolution images or video content, facts sheets and a bio for personality profile pieces.

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